

No one knows 'cept Lorelei

by GloomyMoodsAndInspiration

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Summary: As a new school year starts also new teachers arrive at Cleo's, Emma's and Rikki's school. They seem to know more about the three girls than usual.

1. 1 Prologue

****Disclaimer: Don't own the TV-Show. The story is set between series two and three. The title is taken from a song by "The Pogues" called "Lorelei". ****

* * *

><p>Prologue**
>

When I arrived at the airport, Heathrow to be precise, the heavy rain fell like a massive curtain, making everything grey and uniform. The sky was filled with a dense layer of clouds, promising nothing but the expectation of more cold, wet and thick drops falling downwards for the next hours.

I climbed out the car, opened my umbrella- a navy blue- and pulled the obligatory dull black cagoule closer around me. The rain hammered against the soft fabric jumping back and finally hitting the grey bituminised floor. Then I hauled my luggage out of the boot and went for my terminal.

Even the glasses of the huge hall seemed to have become a bit dirty and blurred by the rain.

Shortly before I entered the huge building I hesitated. Who knows when there was the next chance to feel rain again on my skin? Tickling down my neck and making me wish to have bought a better rain coat instead? I stretched out my arm, caught some of the cold water drops and put my hand back into the warm pocket of the coat. A

gesture like I could capture that bit of rain.

Australia was going to be hot and dry, for most of the time. Maybe I'd be lucky and the sky would open up a bit and let it rain. Just like it permanently did here. One year filled with sun and aridity. Yet my stay there would make it worth being on the other end of the world. I wasn't going to Australia in vain.

Hanna had chosen me. She wanted me to do it. Despite the debacle in the United States three months ago. Even if I didn't show it openly I was thankful for this operation.

Australia was far enough to forget everything troubling my mind here. Far enough away to think about different issues. Plus I would have to bally concentrate myself. The smallest piece of distraction, the inattention of a mere second, might have unimaginable consequences. Maybe for me too, although this was the point I couldn't care less about. In case I wouldn't work correctly people could die; the only thing which I couldn't, wouldn't and certainly won't let happen.

It wouldn't be quite a hazard-free year down there. Our systems had a breakdown lately and the most recent device we possessed was probably a camera build in the year 2000.

I walked through the glass door and the used to always too stuffy air greeted me. In a conversant movement I lowered my umbrella, shook the raindrops away and did a step out of the puddle which had formed under my feet.

Now, I simply had to get onto the plane.

The woman behind the counter smiled widely at me. 'Your passport please.'

2. 2

2_

At lunch break the cafeteria was as overfilled as usual. The seniors who had left the year before were replaced by undergraduates. And the new students did everything in their power to get themselves noticed by everyone and everything.

'One more shout and I'll burn their food', Rikki warned her two best friends in a whisper while glaring at a group of students misusing their fork as catapults for slices of a tomato.

'Give them a chance. We have been as loud as they are now, I assume', Emma tried to calm her.

'We've been worse', smiled Cleo. Her remark made Rikki cross her eyes, yet she focussed on her friends instead on those pubescent teenaged students. At least she concentrated on Lewis who slowly pushed his way through to them.

'I seriously doubt, whether it can get worse', remarked Emma quietly.

'Hey, have you already seen the new ones?' Lewis popped in the

conversation, resting his tray next to Cleo's and giving them all an expectant glance.

'Who are you talking about?' Emma asked and watched her salad with a critical eye. 'Do you think this is actually eatable?'

'Dunno. Maybe, maybe not', Rikki answered.

Emma's question whether Rikki meant the salad or the new ones was ignored. So she decided to let the salad rest, pushed the plate slightly away from her and placed the fork on it.

'Which new ones?', Cleo demanded to know. Maybe a bit too curiously, because Rikki and Emma shot each other a conspired smile.

'What is it with you?' Cleo lifted her fork and eyed her friends in disapproval. 'I just asked a simple question.'

'Teachers', Lewis explained, partly to get the attention away from Cleo who clearly felt embarrassed under Emma's and Rikki's amused stare.

'So what?' As Rikki was not interested anymore, for the mystery of who the newbies were was solved, she took her dismay out on Lewis.

He didn't get a chance to tell more, for the intern school radio gave three beeps and the bit too husky voice of the secretary sounded through the lunch room. 'Good morning. An important announcement: All students and teachers assemble in the auditorium in ten minutes. I repeat: All students and teachers assemble in the auditorium in ten minutes.' There was a short pause and a next sentence already filled the air. It came every year with a sigh. Though the remark stayed the same, the sigh became heavier each time. 'Let the stress begin.'

Exactly ten minutes later, of which they spent eight to stumble through the uncoordinated mess of the younger students, the four of them fell exhausted in their seats. To say, the room would be crowded, would have been an awful understatement. They were glad to sit down and not have to stand the whole time like others, who were a few seconds too late.

'If they have no reason...', Emma menaced, folding her arms in front of her chest.

'Still is better than regular lessons', Rikki told her flicking a strand of her hair behind her shoulder. 'Boring is boring, yet here we don't have to listen!', she added brightly and made Cleo's lips curl up into an amused smile.

The principal stood behind the podium and cleared his throat. He was a man with a fluff of light grey hair covering his shiny head and one of a most accurate style and certainly spending his lone weekends in golf clubs. He arranged the microphone. From one second to another everyone fell silent.

'I'm glad you all came', he started his talk.

'Where else should we be?' asked Rikki, being suddenly annoyed again.

Cleo hissed at her to keep her quiet.

'Our high school has the honor to greet two new teachers taking over the position as head tutors for our eleventh graders. Mr. Christian Brown is going to take over the field of Biology as same as organic Chemistry and Ms. Lorelei Dorset the field of English and Literature of thus and lower grades. Both applied, amongst many others, in a newly developed exchange program we do with schools in London and so will only teach a year.'

Both newly arrived teachers stepped forward. Whilst Mr. Brown stood to the principal's right side, Ms. Dorset hovered at his left.

Lewis eyed both exactly; they were pretty young for his imagination of a teacher - in their late twenties maybe - for which he probably could blame his very imagination of a teacher. The man had slightly waved dark brown hair, or even black, and wore a dark blue shirt underneath what Lewis could classify as a suit. If he was about one eighty in size it would be the first correct estimation Lewis had ever done. He seemed trained and relaxed, yet a bit pale...

Maybe the trademark of the English, because the woman didn't seem to be any more tanned. She wore her hair bound upwards, held by a great barrette, a slim pair of black-framed glasses, and a silver dress reaching down to her ankles. In the next days he would learn that she wasn't simply overdressed, but suspected that her wardrobe practically consisted of sheer endless variations of dresses, skirts, and blouses.

It occurred to him as if both would give each other nothing but a cold stare and yet somehow communicate with one another. As he watched again to prove this theory they smiled at the students and the new literature teacher gave the principal an acknowledging nod. And he noticed, if their principal was about one eighty in height the biology teacher had to be even taller. Maybe he should stop height and age estimations, it would spare him the disappointment of being wrong.

Eventually the principal brought his speech to an end quite fast. However, nearly a whole hour had passed when he finally send the students back into their regular classes. But for the principal it was a short speech. To a certain degree he was proud of himself having kept it quite short. When it came to talking he could never hold himself back. Words just sounded too beautiful to remain unspoken.

3. 3

3_

As soon as the door was closed behind us and we were alone in the room which would become my classroom for the next year, I started my questioning. 'You should be somewhere in Prague or Belfast and as soon as you're done return to London. So what the hell are you doing here?'

Chris lifted his hands in defeat, probably remembering the last time I yelled at him. He'd learned to be careful, good. 'Support you.'

'I don't need no support.' I mentally cursed him. I knew that I was unfair to a high degree. But I needed this. Alone. I wanted to find myself again. Or find at all, to be honest. No, I'll take it back, I didn't want to find anything, I just did not want him around.

'The same as you didn't need back at Lake Ontario where your cover was nearly blown?', he asked, heavy sarcasm in his voice.

Why did he begin with exactly this? Ontario was the one single weak spot in my career. Not even this. It has been a stupid, bloody misunderstanding. Bloody in both senses of the word.

'We are no average s-people, don't miss this, Lorelei', he added in a warning tone. So much as to he'd learned to be careful. The only thing he'd learned was how to drive me mad in less than ten seconds.

'Oh, yes, announce it through the mike. Blow up both of us right away. I'll bet they are going to trust us even more.' Glaring at him I played with the small piece of plastic in front of his eyes. Well, it was only my listening device but it wouldn't fail the obvious meaning of my words. 'Maybe they even are going to skip the publicity, if you ask them nicely. Add a smile and we'd be free of persecution.'

'Why are you that sassy?', Chris asked.

S_top analyzing me_, I thought but remained silent, because I knew that he would counter with his I-can't-stop-it's-part-of-my-personality-you-know-that-theory. And this would be exactly the same I'd tell him - if our argument would've been the other way round.

'Because you giving me a warning of who we are in a place you don't know, in a place foreign intelligence could be active. Because your few words risked the last month I spent in London with preparations for this. Because I want to do it alone and I can do it alone. Because you are wasting your time here, instead of doing an op on your own. I won't send you back but I'd appreciate you leaving me alone doing things my way and not how you believe they would be better for me. It can't be that difficult for you-' the door opened. 'to find an agreement in this case, Mr. Brown', I continued without hesitation, in a calmer voice though. My more than clear sign for him to leave at once.

'It's all left up to you', (what meant as much as: Don't do anything until you've asked me.) he disclosed loyally and disappeared through the door.

'We'll talk later!', I called after him, not in the friendliest tone. He turned around and waved at me cheerfully. Idiot.

A girl with black hair and tanned complexion walked slowly past me. She'd done her hair into two plaited pigtails and wore a purple blouse. I grimaced inside myself. Her style didn't quite fit my kind of repertoire. At least the sight of someone I didn't know yet allowed my blood pressure to calm instantly. The room felt warmed, so I went for the windows, pulled one widely open, leaned back and observed the girl's movements. The attentive glance of her brown eyes had followed me. For a second I caught it and her eyes widened in

shock.

She looked at the floor as she finally noticed that I watched her as well.

'I left my pen', she explained hastily and went to her desk. That was interesting: As soon as people noticed that they were watched on purpose they tried to explain their behaviour.

I nodded and started preparing the board. The date was significant.

'Which date is today?' I inquired, even if I knew the answer by myself. Deep inside we all knew when the time was ripe again. Or maybe I was, just again, an exception.

'The twelfth.'

Letting the chalk sink I slowly turned half around, facing the window with the sun sending its bright light inside the room. The sky was perfectly blue, not a single fluffy cloud disturbed its smoothness. Now I understood, at least partly, why Chris followed me to Australia and was convinced to support me. However he should've asked me before. Ontario really had been a bad slip. A silly misunderstanding I was too proud to admit to him how the background story actually had been. I didn't quite know it by myself to be precise.

'Tonight's full moon again, isn't it?', I asked a little bit lost in my thoughts. I always imagined the moon to be a giant clock with white dial and digits as dark as the night. Slowly filling up to its full size and then beginning to shrink again as the digits slowly tick-tacked on. Every now and then the moon-clock would disappear into the darkness, but at other times it would reflect the sunlight in the most glorious ways. When the clock was round it would begin to fill itself again with sometimes blue, yellow or white colour.

'Yeah', the girl answered. She seemed to be shocked about something. It could only be something in relation to the moon cycle because at the mention of the date she hadn't reacted outwardly.

At least I wasn't an exception in that case. When other people knew, why should I make myself feeling guilty having this knowledge, too?

4. 4

4_

The first lesson with the new teacher came to an end as the school bell rang and he bid the class 'still a great day' and, of course a, 'don't forget to read the text on page twenty for the next lesson.' Lewis took bit longer to leave, because he wanted to ask, whether he could do a presentation about the ecosystem lake.

Mr Brown answered him, the next presentations would be about DNA replication, the brain, higher development of lungs and all the others circular systems and something called prion disease. But he could shift things a bit and promised Lewis, as soon as they would

start with ecosystem he could have his presentation.

Lewis, in return, answered the question who their chemistry teacher was. He earned a nod, a thanks and the request to leave the room, because it had to be locked as long as there was no teacher in it. So, he hastily left and started searching for Cleo and her friends.

After he chased through the whole school building he remembered, they had agreed to meet at the info-board on the second floor. With a deep sigh he made his way up the staircase and saw them as soon as he turned into the hallway.

'That biology teacher is easy go', Lewis called across the floor and headed towards the group of Emma, Cleo and Rikki. They stood by the huge blackboard, more or less carefully reading through the papers pinned on it.

'No one asked for your opinion', Rikki replied as soon as he was close enough to hear.

Emma stated the obvious. 'You're a bit irritated today, aren't you?'

'It's the full moon.' Cleo put away her pen. She didn't know herself, why she still had it in her hands. 'That Ms Dorset is crazy. She asked me whether tonight's full moon or not.'

'There are non-merm- normal humans in this world too, who are interested in the cycle of moon', Emma said correcting herself in the mid-sentence. 'Maybe she believes in the cycles of moon and that what daily horoscopes promise.'

'Teachers aren't normal, Emma.' Rikki scolded her instantly.

'All right, all right.' Defeatedly Emma smiled back at her. 'Tomorrow you're normal again.' Rikki did nothing but phewed at her expectations.

Lewis pointed at the blackboard in front of them. 'But you noticed that Ms Dorset actually is our new head tutor? If we are ever going on a class trip - it will be with her.'

'She takes her time in meeting us as a complete class. As long as I remember our first lesson always was with our head teacher. But she starts tomorrow. It's a bit irresponsible, I think. There's nothing to fear', said Rikki, suddenly being all concerned again.

'Well, she didn't.' Cleo blurted out. She felt bad having brought someone they never met and didn't know at all into criticism. 'I mean the moon. She did not ask precisely', explained Cleo. 'She asked for the date and... I am not quite sure anymore. It was weird anyway. So I believe she actually was asking for the full moon.' Eventually she shook her head. 'The thing is, we have no idea and we shouldn't judge on nothing.'

'Well, Cleo, what do you expect from her name?', demanded Rikki.

'Her name?', repeated Emma, raising a brow. 'I believe it derives

from an ex county or shire, whatever it is called, in England. At least, Shakespeare also used Dorset in his Richard III.'

Rikki shook her head dismissively. 'Nah, I am not talking of Shakespeare. I mean Lorelei. You cannot but be weird with such a name.'

'That would be a pro for the horoscopic moon calendar', added Lewis with a smirk.

5. 5

5_

Of course everyone who is new is highly qualified to be distrusted as soon as possible or to become the centre of local gossip. There isn't differentiated between student and teacher. The secretary - I was aware that I should be able to recall her name in some time without thinking - was the first brave one talking to me. At least she started an half-hearted attempt.

'So, both of you come from London?'

I nodded towards her as I gathered the sheets I had inspected together to one heap. There was nothing in the files which could have helped me. One girl had given up a career as swimmer without explanation, maybe I'd do research on her later this evening.

'Yes, we do.'

'Do- do you know each other well?', she asked her next question, probably one of a long mental list. Yet she'd snapped the trap with this one. She didn't want to know anything about me. Well, she wanted some information, so I gave her some to think about.

'Honestly, just at the last moment. You know the procedure: Everyone has seen everyone somewhere and then someone knows someone who again knows somebody, who again knows someone, who knows someone else by chance... and in the end no one actually knows who is meant.' I sighed deeply and made a typical 'you must know that annoying process' gesture with my hand.

A bit dazzled she echoed my smile. 'I see.' Of course. 'I just thought, since you both came from London that... er... you know...' She flushed slightly and tried to make something clear to me with her gesture. Just that hers really was indefinable. Fortunately, we were alone in the faculty room.

I laughed softly. 'We're not that close. Doc Brown originally is from Stirling, north of Glasgow, so Scotland. And I was born in Carlisle. It's a town quite in the north of England, but still England.'

'Doctor?', she inquired interested my given hint.

I lifted my shoulders, grabbed the files, rose to my feet and gave her a calculating look. 'Biology', I said and went outside. As if Chris really was interested in biology. It's always been psychology. And finances, but I got him away from the latter quite easily.

By time the day slipped past me and as the sun began to fall I was glad the day had passed without problems. There was one of many basic rules: When everyone accepts you at instance they are going to take longer to become suspicious.

Slowly I woke up my computer, waited until the programs where loaded and started typing. Since two days I have got my own, beware of irony, teacher-e-mail-account in the Gold Coast High School intranet. And since a couple of minutes ago everything I do is enciphered, so no one who should not read it, will ever know of its existence, which practically includes most people living on this planet

From: _ldorset ... _

_To: msishq ... _

Subject:_ Arrival and first day_

A wonderful evening to all of you!

Today nothing had happened. Everything remained silent. I bet that I am going miss the constant rain soon, even it always is a new challenge. At least I don't want to grow rusty.

_Thank you a lot for warning me not to be alone. Mr. Brown already threatened me with the promise to take care of me. Shall I tell him that it had been his fault that I nearly died in Lake Ontario? Well, he saved me in counter-manoeuvre. At least that is his point of view on the whole story. _

Tonight I'm going to get familiar with the city map. Doing something outside is pointless. I haven't found my protÃ©gÃ©(e)s yet. Somehow I believe to have met one already and found another in the files. Less I have heard from the other side. The danger, as you call it, keeps itself hidden. Everything we can do is hope that it won't change in the next few days.

It is difficult to go against organizations as we are as they use our tricks. Although it should set them limitations in their actions. The same we are with no real legend and equipment.

Have I mentioned that I hate our teacher email addresses? Everyone with a little bit of fantasy paired with luck and a bit of a brain is able to decode them. Yet this only could do one of us :)

The postcard I promised you has to wait until I get a decent picture of Great Barrier Reef. So it might take a while, don't count on it too soon. Maybe during the holidays as a snap shot while we search the whole country.

Send very best wishes to everyone

ld

I'm going to do some testing. Are you sure that there is no one?

I hit the send key.

In the very next moment someone knocked at the wooden frame of my

entrance door.

'Come in!' I called without looking who it might be. Instead, I closed my laptop and put it away safely.

'You should be more careful about whom you let in.' I heard Chris' voice. Teacher-like.

'You're right.' I turned around to face him. 'Any objections if I kick you out again?' My voice was huffed, suppressing the smile which rose up inside me.

'You told me those moods are nothing more than a myth.'

'So are we.' I countered and sighed. 'I'm sorry.'

'Actually I should be used to it when it comes from you. No matter which mood.'

'And non-actually?', I asked.

'We shouldn't be here.'

'Right again.' I thought about something. 'How about a horror movie?', I asked slowly.

'My ambition isn't quite as high as yours.' Ha! He still thought I would be interested in something like that.

'Your problem. It's my flat, what a pity for you. In four weeks you may decide.' I stood up and walked to the cupboard as another thought crossed my mind. 'Have you had dinner?'

'Sadly not, I was kept away from it.'

'The secretary already fancies you a lot. Maybe you'll find someone?' I laughed.

'Again, my intention is not in this direction.' Chris laughed too.

'Ah, you remembered me of something more important. Let's watch today's tapes. I had a quite interesting talk to her. Lisa's her name, isn't it?', I asked. Then he would know what I've told her about him.

'How should I know?', he requested.

'You have been with her the past hours, not me', was my reply.

'Jealous?', he asked, being utterly serious from the one second to the next.

I waited before I even thought of answering, instead glancing at the few DVD lines - I'd ordered them in their colour from the lightest to the darkest - in front of me. For a long while I watched him from the corner of my eye. Then I shook my head, but said nothing.

6_

'Uh, it's co-o-o-old today.' Kim cuddled in her seat trying to sit without shaking and wrapped her jacket closer around her. She had caught a bad cold a few days ago. At this particular cool morning she felt it was in the fading-phase and though, she should still stay home, their Dad insisted on her eating breakfast with her older sister at such an early time. However, the mood between her and her sister proofed to be as frozen as the morning.

Kim had been lying down the last threee days, her head burning and her nose as heavy as a rock and evaded Cleo's rare outbursts of compassion. She enjoyed the sister-ish cold, as her forehead still was on fire, but she wanted to make Cleo talk. Instead of the usual silence between them, she would rather have her sister talking about anything.

Cleo gave her exclamation a short glance and ate without any comment her cereals. Her thoughts still clung to last night. All the three of them, Emma, Rikki, and her, had survived the full moon without any dangers. At least she knew that she had and could only guess about her two best friends. As the world looked the same like yesterday evening, she was quite sure they weren't accidentally controlled by the moon.

She had managed it more or less through the help Lewis' had offered. He called all of them every hour to control whether they had control over their own minds.

So of course he on his part, as much as Cleo guessed, had to survive Rikki's sarcasm and her frequently annoyed comments according his calls.

Cleo jumped out of her chair as the door bell rang. She headed for the door and opened it widely. Seeing Emma and Rikki, a wide smile spread over her face. 'Ey, you two! Finally you came..I nearly died out of boredom.' She lowered her voice to a whisper. 'And Kim... still has an eye on me.' As it seemed they weren't moonstruck last night, but looked as tired as she felt. For a moment she thought of Lewis. Poor him must have been unable to close an eye last night.

'Maybe we will soon, depends on our new tutor', Rikki smirked. At least she wasn't as moody as the day before. 'You know, if it's really boring, we still could mess it up a bit', she suggested.

'No, Rikki', mumbled Emma instantly. 'Don't even think of it.'

Cleo called a 'bye' into the house, waited for a response, which didn't came, and then closed the door behind her. 'Let's go-'

7_

Trying to figure out who I was to look after, I tortured the light orange sponge by squeezing it onto the blackboard rubbing away the

white chalk. Leaving dark blue tracks each time I did so. Some slightly white coloured water drops ran their way down the blackboard, gathered themselves into greater drops and finally fell down to the floor. After glaring at them for five minutes until they stopped dropping I turned around swiftly and sat down. On my desk in the class room rested a calculator. Attentive people might notice that in English and Literature lessons such a mathematic machine wasn't necessary and would ask oneself why I'd use it. Yet, most people weren't attentive enough to notice the calculator at all. So I let it rest on the wooden desk. At least, as long as it beeped. Not normal for a calculator too, isn't it?

I opened the calculator and scrolled down the messages (hitting the 'plus' button several times) appearing on the slim screen until I found Hanna's latest.

From_: msishq ..._

To: _ldorset ..., cbrown ..._

Subject: _Pictures_

_Good morning, _

_I am very sorry about this. Of course, I should have given you the photographs days before you left - plus the names at all. Our system crash down somehow must have affected my memory in a bad way. Your protÃ©gÃ©es are Cleo Sertori, Emma Gilbert, Rikki Chadwick and their friends and families, of course. You also have to keep an eye on Lewis McCartney; he is a lot with the girls. Minor: Zane Bennett, Ash Dove and Charlotte Watsford if she dares to do anything out of ordinary again. The girls were able to hold Charlotte back on their own, yet they are going to be powerless against higher powers.

_

Forgive me that play on words.

_You have to go after a certain Dr. Sven Green. His ID is an obvious fake. Sadly we could not find out who he really is, or what exactly he plans. He seems to search for a kind of weapon. Something with which its help he might control every being on this earth. Though, it is strange that we do not even have a real profile picture of him. Just this faked ID. I have to admit, it is kind of canny that he got through the borders with it. This picture is the main example for a faked ID in every lecture book. A seven year old with a pair of scissors and glue could have done better. _

I do not like our teacher/school email addresses a lot too, you have mentioned it at least a hundredths of times. And I am sorry, Lorelei, I have not found anyone yet who fits your profile given to me. And you know that you would be the first I would tell.

_Chris, you have been warned. You knew she would not like you to go down to Australia too. _

_Sadly we had no progress and even every routine job including a bit of technological equipment nearly is impossible for us. I hate us being determined by what technology requires, though we cannot change it. We are going to stick at the greater and smaller boat and ship accidents all around the world. Save some lives so

far._

hq

Attachment: 4

I flipped through the pictures and noticed the girl from yesterday. The heading gave her away as Cleo Sertori. Assumption one, proved. I was pleased to notice that Emma Gilbert, the girl with the ex swimming career, actually belonged to the three of them. Rikki Chadwick, her school record had struck me this morning as I'd read through all of my class's files. Though she had produced a thick heap of paper over the years, I somehow appreciated her temper. Probably she was the leader of their group. So, scare her, make her listen and the other two would also listen. However, I suspected scaring her would be easier than make her listen and have her following orders. Suppressing a small smile I opened the last picture. It was Lewis McCartney, Chris would know more about him than I did now.

Then I recalled the case file _C1._ We had noticed the happenings around Charlotte too late because there still wasn't enough, say, no contact between Australia and Great Britain. If the situation had escalated Hanna probably would have send someone like Kevin. Someone, who works totally in the background. He wouldn't have needed an ID card, neither a faked nor his own. According to the files the three girls had managed it alone.

Pleased, I closed my calculator again. Sticking back a strand of my hair I set the small device in my ear on.

'You're awake, Chrissy?' I nearly whispered.

'I read Hanna's mail. I've met the boy, Lewis, yesterday', he informed me and verified my assumption that they had already come across each other. 'Cleo is the one who walked in yesterday, right?'

'Indeed, and found Emma in the files. So I could count back to the month they probably changed. I'm going to have them in class in a few minutes. Of course I am doing my kind of HUMINT. Don't try to change my mind.'

There was a slight chuckle on the other end of the line. 'I never could change your mind. Be careful, the other shouldn't notice a bit', he told me.

'Are you serious? I didn't know.'

A sigh. 'See you later', said Chris.

'Have fun, Doc Brown.'

In the next moments the first students already arrived. As everyone was present, my four included, I shortly introduced myself. Actually I repeated what the principal had said yesterday and added a warning about my strictness. No scribbled notes secretly send around. I would read them out loud. Absolutely no cheating in tests and exams. And always be in time. 'It's your turn now. Everyone please tell one or two words about oneself, for I have to remember your names freely.' An unnecessary exercise, I already knew the names and faces of all

classes I would teach this year.

8. 8

8_

'You're right, she is crazy. Have you noticed the way she watched me?', Rikki asked quietly as soon as the lesson was over, still being in the classroom. She collected her things and carelessly threw them in her bag.

'Not different as everyone else in this room.' Emma carefully folded her file and placed it between heaps of books. 'Or maybe she took a little bit more interest in you, because you wrote such a crappy story on our first task.'

'She said it was okay, with many fantastic elements.'

'Maybe Rikki is right.' Cleo whispered, glancing shortly at her teacher, who quietly answered someone's question. 'She asked me about the moon cycle, remember it?' She wanted to add some more but her hand suddenly felt moistened.

'Uh-', she called and jumped in shock. 'That's water! Why is that water?' Frantically Cleo searched for a towel or something with a similar function. She tried her T-Shirt but it didn't seem to work. Mentally she counted the seconds backwards until she would be exposed to the whole class.

Few students already had left, among them Zane and Ash. Zane because Rikki had glared at him as soon as he dared to hesitate and wait for her and Ash, because he had agreed to meet up later with Emma. Yet, the others hesitated curiously to see Cleo freak out for the apparent first time in her life.

Ten.

It was like black magic, a dreadful nightmare. As often as she tried to dry it as often the tiny drop reappeared. Or it didn't vanish at all. Cleo wasn't quite sure about the difference between both anymore, she only noticed that it didn't work at all.

Nine.

Rikki held a hand above Cleo's arm, sending warmth to dry the drop off.

'I am unable to do anything,' she murmured as Cleo had to pull away for the heat Rikki caused was too much to take and the small drop still remained on her hand as if Rikki was powerless.

Eight.

'Do something. Anything!' She hissed hectically and hysterically the same. Lewis eyes flickered through the room and noticed a towel hanging in front of the class room, next to the white ceramic sink.

Seven.

Though the towel could prove as useless as Cleo's and Rikki's prior attempts, it was hope neither of them was able to neglect right now.

Six.

He began running towards the sink avoiding the school bags of the other student, who stared at him.

Five.
>

Half of her time was up. And nothing had worked. She didn't believe Lewis idea would work either. A towel would be no different to her T-Shirt or Rikki's powers.

Four.

'Lewis. Hurry!', Emma called.

Three.

Cleo was certain now that they wouldn't be able to stop the effect water had on her. But it also was too late to run away. She would change. In front of her class, in front of humans, ignorant and probably uncomprehending humans. She wished to disappear into the ground. To be far, far away from this horrible place.

Two.

'You do a very good job being in the centre of attention of... practically everyone.' Neither Emma nor Rikki said this, but it was in a bit cynical way a comment by her new tutor. She had risen from her seat, still standing behind the desk a slim folder in her hands. The one she was talking to earlier, stood beside her, his mouth open in fascination and stared at Cleo. Even her teacher appeared to be in some way intrigued by Cleo's behaviour. 'I thought you'd be the down-to-earth kind of person, lessâ€| hyperventilating.'

Next to her, Rikki was close to explode, this comment irating her. Heat crept from her and Cleo grabbed her arm, to keep her from doing something stupid, like setting the class room aflame. 'Please, don't', she mumbled desperately.

One.

Cleo even heard Emma and Rikki holding their breath in expectation. Her heart raced as if she had a marathon behind her and her vision blurred slightly.

Zero.

Nothing happened.

Cleo felt and clearly saw the tiny drop of water on the back of her hand, slowly running down her index finger leaving a slightly shiny trace behind. Dropping on her block the paper instantly absorbed the few bits of water.

Her classmates who had watched Cleo partly shocked, partly fascinated in her hyperventilation disappeared slowly through the door. Still some of them hesitated.

'So what? Next world wonder?', Rikki grumbled at them and even made the last go voluntarily.

'You are alright, aren't you?' The voice of her teacher disturbed Cleo's trail of thoughts. She obeyed her closely and seemed to be worried. 'If you're afraid of spiders, I may get it awayâ€|'

Cleo glanced at the floor wishing not to blush. 'No! Yeah, I just got surprised.' Involuntary she shot a glance at her hand.

'I'll act I'd believe you, if there's nothing serious.' She gathered the rest of her few things together, cleaned her writings from the blackboard with a sponge, and washed her hands, clearly dismissing the chalk's remaining. After she closed the tap again she turned to Lewis, stretching out her arm in demand, the palm of her hand facing upwards. 'McCartney, please. Give that towel back. There's a reason why it's in the front of a classroom and not in the back.'

A bit slow in reaction he walked back to the sink and handed her the white fabric. She accepted it with a nod, hung it back to where it belonged and turned to the rest of them. 'I am sorry but you have to leave the room. And I am supposed to close it down, you're the last ones in, so hurry up.' As she had closed it she disappeared quickly on the school hallway and left them in front of the door.

'What happened?,' asked Emma as they were alone. Of course she had noticed what happened, yet it didn't mean that she understood.

'I don't know. Why haven't I changed?' Cleo's fright in her tone of voice would have been impossible to hide. 'And this on my first day at school. I am going to be the water freak girl for her.'

'It would've been worse if you would have changed', Rikki mumbled. 'Then you'd be _the_ mermaid for everyone.' None of the others would say anything against her words.

After all she was right.

9. 9

9_

The first thing Cleo did when she arrived home was to barricade herself in the bathroom. Well, before she slammed the lightly colored entrance door shut behind her, sped upstairs without noticing any surroundings and threw her bag heedlessly into a far corner of her room.

Now facing herself in the mirror she noticed her expression was still struck with fear and angst of the last lesson. Why hadn't she changed? As Rikki said, it had been a blessing in disguise that she hadn't changed, yet for a mermaid it was a disguise in blessing not to change when they touched water. And after all she was a mermaid for nearly two years now, wasn't she?

Cleo closely examined her reflection. Her eyes appeared to have captured the worry about her secret for the rest of her entire life. It even seemed to have affected the corners of her lips, which were in a straight line instead featuring a small smile as always.

To calm herself Cleo slowly counted to three, inhaling and exhaling for every number she spoke and pronouncing them like she'd learned in kindergarten and primary school.

'Okay, we'll know soon.' She didn't know exactly why she spoke in plural. It even was a mystery to her why she talked loudly the same.

Cleo turned the water tap fully on and grabbed into the cold water with both hands. Though, it took her some bravery to force her hands staying under the cool water and not pulling away, she even splashed some of it on her arms to make sure she was covered in the cold liquid. She closed her eyes and counted from ten backwards.

_Two. _

With every second that passed Cleo wished to pull away and dry her hands. For once she was afraid not to change. On the other side she didn't want to think about the prior situation in case she would change.

One.

It ran against her instincts letting the water flow across her skin. After loosing her inner battle whether to pull away or to stand the jet of water Cleo eventually pulled away and closed the tap in a hurry, still with wet and drippy hands.

Zero.

Anxiety in her features Cleo suddenly noticed her mirror image slipping to the left and herself following suit.

'Uh-oh.' As she lost balance and fell to the floor and hit the soft fabric of the carpet Cleo started laughing in relief. As her feet and legs had vanished and been replaced by an orange fin her former thoughts seemed to have vanished too and changed into pure happiness. Resting her head on the carpet she made fists. Still mermaid!

Then another thought made her frown: When it hadn't been the water, or herself? What was the cause that she hadn't changed?

A few bangs at the bathroom door made her return to reality and realize that she wasn't alone. She sat up and blinked a few times. Daylight seemed to have increased in the last few moments. But maybe her mind only played tricks on her and the light had been that clear and warm all day long.

'Boy, Cleo. Hurry up!' Her little sister called being truly annoyed and hit again against the wooden door.

'Be patient one time in your life', called Cleo who watched her surroundings. The sink looked quite different from this angle. Taller and almost threatening in its lower shapelessness as well as ceramic clunkiness.

'Dad's impatient with you because you rushed past him without saying a word', Kim told her with as much casualness as if she was describing a picture on the wall.

'Okay, you won.' Wanting to rise to her feet Cleo already had forgotten about the mermaid fin, stumbled backwards and fell again. 'I need a little more time.'

10. 10

10_

By time darkness enclosed burning lights of the day and radically cooled it down. Red heat was regressed by dark blue coldness from one to the next second and a haze of grey covered everything. I closed the window of my flat swinging back the sash inward and let the roller blinds down - I loved spring rollers, especially wooden, which stopped at any point by activity of a ratchet mechanism. As I sat back in a swivel chair I closed my eyes for the few seconds and inhaled calmly.

Still the different rhythms of night and day of the southern hemisphere dazzled me. Tomorrow, or the day after it, I finally should be used to the time change.

Switching the grand lights off I woke up my laptop.

From: _ldorset ..._

To: _msishq ..._

Subject: _Second Day _

A wonderful evening with a lot of rain!

Today was a bit better. Well, that's a lie anyway. Nothing happened. I hope it's going to rain soon. I already wish for the day the ticket back to England is in my hands. It's not that bad but hot. I don't want to look like a French fry when I come back, it wouldn't fit the London underground after all. Yet nature's quite pretty here.

Tomorrow's a more explicit report.

ld

I closed my computer and turned around with my chair. The dim blue light made the room vague in its silhouettes. This house was beautiful in a way, without question. Not as comfortable as my small flat at home but quite secure and spacious. The intertwining rooms somewhat where like the ones in the house we once possessed in Carlisle, more than twenty years back in the North of England. It somehow had a modern touch of the offices in _Westminster & Son's Bank Ltd. _where I once had been undercover as Christine Burton. The new girl with high qualifications and in a good relationship with the big boss a.k.a. main target.

It's been a lot of new experience whereas it had been my first

recruitment and I was able to test Chris in every way I wanted. I probably drove him mad and betimes making himself ask what Christine Burton actually was up to. Of course Jason Crane, his boss, was the bad guy. But to get a second access I slowly started to gain Chris' trust - which was quite easy. So in case, Crane would have noticed anything being wrong with me, I still would have had Chris to bring him down to his knees.

Yet it was Hanna's idea to give him some hints of the nature of our work, so in event he would notice he would try to contact us in some way. He'd set an ad in a local newspaper a few weeks after the Crane file was successfully closed. I already had thought he wouldn't get it anymore. He had been quite shocked as he learned me being his new superior.

At some times I believed that Chris tried to be retributive for kind of every trouble I'd caused him. And, counted together, it was a lot of trouble.

Once, in his early training course I'd asked him to attack me and told him that it wouldn't hurt lot. Well, it didn't hurt for me (but for him) as he lost the short fight, not even lasting half a minute. Next I'd scared him with honey-trapping by revealing him that I'd used him before to get a way to his boss. Simply put, I used him when I was Christine Burton and feigned any deeper interest. He didn't take this one quite well. Then I hired Marion to teach him to shoot at me (or anyone else) in case I would tell him to do so.

And he was badly outraged as I actually told him to shoot at me. I'd been in need for some mugging including exchange of fire, or that's what I told him. As he later found out that this whole operation he should help with had been a fake, his attitude didn't get better towards me. The reason behind the fake operation had been an incident with Leyla the week before his training began. Though, he neither knew about Leyla nor the incident.

I'd set her on a businessman who had been turned by another secret service before, what we didn't know. In the end he threatened me to kill her when I'd come one step towards both of them. I directly shot him. It happened so fast he probably didn't notice. Unfortunately, Leyla freed herself the very moment the bullet went through him and so it left a superficial wound at the side of her throat. She'd been sent to hospital for two weeks aftermath, very much to her distress.

Hanna then told me that I should get everyone of us mentally so far that they would shoot when necessary. And Chris, being the new guy and my trainee was the first to learn that lesson. I'd been with Leyla in hospital that day so I left it up to Marion to train him precise shooting. As fragile as she always appeared to be, no one would expect her to be fan of hunting since she could think.

Next I'd ordered him back to his psychology class. Actually I'd been a bit cross with him because he was quite good and had skipped psychology for finances. I had the best results this year and so forced him to relearn every psychological skill he once had possessed and would ever possess by heart.

Each time he'd managed it to get a girlfriend and each time he hadn't it were either Leyla, Hanna or me calling out for him to prepare for

a new case. However, when it wasn't me to pick him up from somewhere it was no interruption at all - the misery seemingly to laid on me interrupting or cracking all his dates. Well, it mainly had been me knocking at his door at unthinkable times at night or tracking him down in various shopping malls and restaurants.

Obviously, we have no real working spans. Our work depends on how terrorists and accidents happen to occur.

The only thing I still didn't get is his accurst concern. As soon as anything happened Chris was concerned. Each time we ran an operation or he'd been in an operation and came back to the head quarter he was concerned. When one of the two of us was in a long lasting op, about one or two months, Chris always sent me a text message in the end of it. _How are you? _Betimes, even if one of us got hurt in the slightest of ways.

Yet, if I would have to choose one of the things I'd miss in lack of his company this would be in between the top three. Not that I was ever going to admit it openly, but it was cute in some way that he cared. Hanna said I should be glad that he did, because I didn't.

There were a few other things which regularly made me wish to curse him, I would miss though.

Through his training course I taught him a bit of interrogator. Sadly, he'd learned quite fast how to use this knowledge against me. Worse was that I have never met anybody who had the same power over my will.

I don't know when he figured out, I probably told him one night I've been drunk because I broke up with a boyfriend I didn't like. (And it just happened once or twice since we knew each other.) However, he denies that I told him it would that _ask_ing a question, _lock_ing his eyes with mine and _nod_ding. I could fool everyone in this world but not damn him. It always felt like he wanted to persuade me to mentally open up to him: _You can trust me. _

And I know I can't and don't want. Somehow I have no choice; each time when he does this ask-lock-nod-strategy, I am always honest. To be fair to him, he never used it for his personal advantage, which impressed me.

Or Leyla, Marion, Peter, Hanna, Ivy... all of us and also probably the rest of the world wouldn't be able to sneak up behind me. People I know and knew - I sort their footsteps in a scheme. Hence, I always know whether to expect danger or not to expect danger. Foreigners; I'm quickly able to sort them in a specific pattern and against bad guys I'm able to defend myself easily. Yet my colleague wanted to be someone special and of course wouldn't let himself sort in any of my provided schemes. As soon as I notice Chris anywhere near me and I don't recognise him my thoughts reflexively turn to self-defence: When there is danger I know how to eliminate this and my mind is on attack.

So I always am close to attack him, yet in the very last second I notice that there is no reason to attack him. Physically I stop every counteraction but mentally I start imagining what I would do. Then I eventually identify him and I jerk backwards because I most

definitely don't want to do this and it would end in at least two broken bones for him. Many are quite fragile, coming to think of itâ€¦|

Another thing he scares me with is his driving skills. He rushes through the streets of London, doing everything but keeping his eyes on the road in front of him for more than five seconds, whilst I cling in the passenger's seat as pale as a glass of milk. That doesn't mean I'm frightened of fast driving but I don't like driving fast. Lest with him driving.

And it is not the obvious and obviously wrong prejudice that women don't like driving fast at all. It had been an experience in childhood that shaped my personality.

I haven't been an easy-care child anyway. Many things frightened, repelled and disgusted me. No one could reach out for me, neither did I open up to anybody. Actually, I ran away several times to be alone but always came back one to two days later, because I didn't want the people around me to be too worried or concerned (what an awfully word) about me. Though my behaviour was... extraordinary, we never had any talks about that issue (my marks were blameless on the contrary). Maybe I've been the stranger all along, a maverick. Nevertheless, I even managed it to have some - two or three - friends to limit trouble _(_it felt like a threat:_ either you finally make social contacts or you'll have to go to psychotherapy again) _until I headed for university and Hanna's small Group.

11. 11

11_

The week passed calmly, there were neither questionings about Cleo's freak-out, nor any further strange incidents happening to one of them which would threat their mermaid secret. Rikki had a couple of word-fights with their teacher, but lost them all, whilst Emma and Cleo hid behind their desks, hoping the argument wouldn't go any further. Yet, Rikki wasn't to give up and found in every lesson something new to pick and be picked upon. She couldn't forgive her teacher's attention-comment on Cleo. And Friday happened to be a full on Dorset-Day for Rikki, so she was in best spirits for the whole day. First lesson was English. Then she had free time to prepare for Literature.

Apart from Rikki's rebellious struggles, nothing of importance happened.

All in all it was a bit too calm one may think, because if the development would have been normal there would have been inquiries about Cleo's behavior. Friday afternoon, exactly the second the clock stroke five Lewis, Emma, Rikki and Cleo met at JuiceNet CafÃ©. All the four of them had a juice in front of them, orange in color.

They'd searched for a desk inside and more importantly, far away from the entrance and quite separated from every other desk which was occupied. Not many were occupied anyway. Some couples, a group of young men, a business meeting, two guys quite in front of them, and some adults playing billiard.

'I don't understand. At home everything worked. I am all right, don't feel sick. Nothing. I've checked every day, but I am as average as always', Cleo wondered. The happenings on Tuesday morning still struck her.

'Don't make a fuss about it. Maybe you just imagined this drop.'

'I have felt it, Rikki. You nearly burnt my hand. In addition you all have seen it', said Cleo who clearly remembered how the heat caused by Rikki had swept through her hand.

'Were you influenced by the moon?', Lewis asked her.

'It was at day. I hardly believe that this could be possible', Emma thought loudly but didn't sound reassured at all. 'You weren't under the influence of the moon, were you?' Subconsciously she pushed her drink away, dismissing the idea of the moon.

'Of course not.' Cleo argued slightly irritated. 'At least, I'm quite positive I wasn't.'

'We should wait', Lewis said, stirring the liquid in his glass with a spoon while trying to make up a decent theory. He knew none of the girls would appreciate another of his experiment. Then he started tapping his fingers in a high speed against the surface of the table as he didn't find any and grew more and more impatient with himself. 'I'll do some research', he eventually muttered.

A woman, shoulder lengths, dark-reddish, hair entranced the Café wearing a shoulder free, nearly ankle lengths and bordeaux colored dress. However, it didn't seem posh but too old fashioned for a sun-frock. She made her way to the bar at once not noticing any surroundings. Hadn't taken much effort on making her appearance perfect with a lot of makeup and accessories, for the moment that mattered, elegance had its victory as she passed through the room.

Then slowly talks were raised again.

'Unbelievable.' Rikki mumbled and slightly waved a dismissive hand at the bar. 'Talking of the devil is not necessary anymore, thinking is by far enough.'

She said something to Wilfred and both enjoyed a short talk. When he disappeared - smiling benignly - into the kitchen she leaned against a chair waiting. Lost in thoughts she took a paper napkin and began unfolding it to its full seize, flattened it by tracing the wrinkles slowly with her index finger, then folding it back into size, carefully re-tightening each wrinkle and unfolding it again...

'Which teacher can afford this kind of dress? ' Emma observed her out of the corner of an eye. 'And every day another one.'

'Not many, as it seems. For she reads horoscopes her styling is good', admitted Cleo.

Lewis only shrugged and continued tapping his fingers on the table in front of them. Rikki hit Lewis fingers because he didn't stop even

though she had glared at them since he started. 'That is annoying.' She said and stared past him, bugged by the irregular noise he'd created.

A few seconds later one of the two guys, one blonde the other dark haired, sitting at the desk in front of them, jumped in amazement, his stool hitting the floor with a loud bang. Everyone in the Café turned to him, but he didn't care at all and anxiously stared at his glass. His whole body was trembling slightly.

'It's boiling! ', he shouted.

Emma, Cleo and Lewis faced Rikki inquiringly. 'It is not my fault. That wasn't me.' She defended herself, irritation in her voice. 'Honestly, I just-' Again, she hit Lewis and stared past him, instead of explaining what she hadn't done.

'Ow', Lewis complained through clenched teeth.

The other guy sitting opposite to the first also jumped backwards. 'Mine too!', he exclaimed pointing wildly at the glass containing a pastel green liquid. 'You see the smoke? See the smoke! It's smoking!', he stated for the third time.

'It wasn't me, trust me', Rikki hissed uneasily in her position. She'd been heated up all day, but this was not her fault!

As soon as Wilfred returned with ice cream and a green-blue soda, Miss Dorset let go of the napkin, took her order and made a wondering gesture towards the two dazzled men who still were too afraid to sit down again. After pointing out their problem she thanked Wilfred, paid and went the same way she had come. On the way back she noticed her students and waved at them.

With great curiosity Rikki watched Wilfred trying to calm both young men and eventually taking away their drinks from the desk and held them as he stood.

'Where do you see the problem, mates? They are as cool and smooth as used to be.' Shaking his head he brought the drinks back behind the bar.

Rikki folded her arms in front of her chest in a manner of I-told-you. Though the situation wasn't one to laugh about she couldn't quite prevent a small smile curling up her lips.

12. 12

12_

From: _ldorset ..._

To: _msishq ..._

Subject: _A week and nearly a second one_

And no rain at all. The warmth is quite endurable but I wish for rain. That sounds like a three year old - sorry.

_It's a miracle but Chris and I get along better, which is, quite normal now. Have you threatened him with deskwork? _

However, some things changed. What exactly? In a count of three being a hundred percent I have exactly collected 66.66 %. The day after tomorrow we'll have the last results, at least I hope so. For comparison: CS â€" average determining water; RC â€" heating, not only liquids; probably burning and flashlights; EG â€" cooling down and freezing, not only liquids too. Next will be scaling down collateral damage.

_Did you know how boring the job of a teacher is? I always thought that students have to suffer most, since teachers are bores; but actually teachers are boring because their job makes them boring. Marks, papers, congresses... _

ld

Thanks for the criminal lighthouse keeper. Even though it's pretty idiotic; which is the world, our world, where lighthouse keepers are criminals? What happened to the great Mafioso guys and real criminals like bombers, traitors and the rest of them? I know we shouldn't wish for it, though a bit action would bring back what you call concentration and adrenaline.

She closed her computer and grabbed an old, washed out, violet cardigan with one hand and a tiny, silver can of oil with the other while she went for the car. Chris already awaited her in a lightly colored van. Black wires and a electricity meter formed the almost readable writing of a widely spread supplier of electric energy in the region of Gold Coast.

He opened her door from the inside and waited for her to climb in, all the time eyeing her with amusement. 'You look old. That blouse is how old? Sixty years? Seventy?' He said smirking as she settled and did her seatbelt. Once, apart from service, he had dared to start the car before she had closed the door completely and was forced into an emergency brake less than one hundred metres later. Otherwise, it might have led to causalities inside the car.

'Eighty. And the cardigan adds another twenty. Besides, I already told you that you don't know any good chat up line, and you look too good for someone who works in dusty places,' saying that she reached out for the oil can she'd brought and greased the black gold in her hands. Then she patted Chris cheeks and cleaned her hands at the sleeve of his shirt. 'Better.'

He winced slightly. 'Don't be so cruel to your son. Smells obscene.'

'I am your younger mother, I am allowed to do that', she scolded him playfully. 'And keep a bit of pity for me as you'll lose me at the criminal lighthouse keeper's lighthouse. In addition, you insulted my blouse.'

'I'll invite you to the finally-got-rid-party afterwards.'

Lorelei put on white gloves, which only matched the image of an old woman perfectly instead of replying.

'Why the gloves?' Chris asked.

'The hands and dÃ©colletÃ© give away the age of a woman most plainly', said she as buttoned her white blouse up to her neck.

'Mh-mh', he murmured, paying more attention than necessary to the street in front of him. 'You got the data of our lighthouse?'

'Quite like St. Peter's Port, just without any castle and about one century younger. Well, it is also at the end of a pier. The height could have been worse. You know that there is a singular boat landing place on the site of the ocean? '

'You obviously do', Chris said instead of admitting that he didn't know.

'For fast escape of our dear Jeremy. If you don't mind, I will minimize his means of escape to a car or a swimming route. Latter he won't see as a true possibility.'

'You don't have to. I can do it, either. See, you probably won't have a lot of time once you jumped, but Jeremy will take me down to his boat. Even if it's just to show me some wheel chair shards.'

'Okay, that's your part then. Next we have a mixture of steppingstone and balcony at the height of ten metres in addition to what is between lighthouse and water. I guess about fourteen to eighteen metres in the end.'

'The balcony is a balcony. You use it as steppingstone', Chris mumbled. His words triggered something in her, he noticed as soon as he'd spoken them. Something, that unloaded anger towards him.

'Oh, just enjoy the pretty good equipment we have here!' She paused and sighed. _I know I overreact. it's not your fault._ 'Right... listen, you have to install the wire directly in his data cable so we can intercept all current information running through his systems. I'll give you the very moment you start through radiophony. It might be that you'll have about twenty seconds only.' She stopped talking for a second to hand him a small USB.

'No, he will give you the clue by himself. I'll get the whole software and files on his hard disk and maybe find an extended hard disk, all the easier then. You then give me the flash drive back.' She inhaled to pause and made a face. 'Awful, you're right. That stuff smells horribly.'

They said nothing more until a giant dark orange stone terrace came into sight and a rather small tower at the head of it appeared. As they came closer the tower seemingly grew and finally didn't appear to be small at all, more like a faulty designed water tank. A broad, metallic, red painted door with a wheel instead of a handle and small slim windows strengthened the imagination of a reservoir.

Behind it the sea rolled constantly against the stones. The car stopped about twenty yards away and Chris climbed out, opened the boot and heaved out a wheel chair.

'Come on, old young woman.' He helped Lorelei into it. 'It's a

mystery to me. How did you manage to look about fifty years older than you are?'

'Dehydration makes a lot, my uneducated son.' Even if he didn't see her face he surely heard the eye rolling in her voice.

Chris pushed her towards the high building and rang the bell. 'I won't bother you with my unworthy presence, wise mother.'

'Is this an insider for throw yourself off the steppingstone as soon as possible? '

'Have you expected some different hidden content in my words?'

They fell silent as steps emerged and the heavy metal door was opened. A young man dressed in a neatly suit greeted them. It was obvious that whatever he did wasn't for sailors.

'Hello? You're the electricity controllers?! Finally.' He shot a relieved glance at Chris and a questioning one at Lorelei in a wheelchair smiling kindly up at him.

'Yes, well, I am Daniel Kean. I had to bring my mother with me. The Nanny called at last notice and id she couldn't take care for her today. So I was forced to bring her with me.' He mouthed a voiceless sorry.

'That nice man escorted me to the movies', Lorelei prattled without context still smiling. Suddenly her smile changed into excitement. 'Must be an expensive movie! Like the old times! '

'No problem, Daniel. I'll accompany her while you work. She won't meddle up your work', the suit man said, taking over Lorelei's wheel chair.

'She loves the fresh air', Chris told him as they entranced the building and a lift, bringing them to the upper floor. It was a small cabin, barely big enough for all the three them.

'I have a balcony. You can find us there.' He then explained the way to the "electro-room" as he named it. Chris nodded and went for the technician's room.

As soon as they were alone, suit man rolled Lorelei onwards. 'God, where has that guy worked before? He stinks like dead fish inlaid in burnt crude naphtha', Jeremy Hilford Junior mumbled being slightly disgusted. 'I'll show you a wonderful film with that nice man in it.' he said louder, and placed her in front of many monitors.

'Who?', asked Lorelei.

'The guy who brought you here.'

'Ah...is it theatre then? And who are you, young man?', she asked curiously. 'When I have been young, men like you were rare.'

'Jeremy Hilford Junior, I took over my father's company at the sea.'

Lorelei didn't answer, instead watching the screens where Chris was

working at the power distribution. They had expected video-surveillance. Everything as assumed, so far.

'You all play e-piano, you young generation; we had a great piano at home. My husband would play all night if I asked him to do', she swooned in old memories pointing at the keyboard for screen control and leaned forward, switching inadvertently on the radiophony which would enable Chris to listen to their conversation.

Jeremy Hilford Junior didn't reply anything, watching Chris who started to write down numbers in his files. Suddenly he heard coughing next to him.

Turning around he saw Daniel Kean's demented mother becoming pale and shaking violently with every cough. 'Won't you kick the bucket!', he yelled and searched her bag. As he didn't find anything which looked like medicine he darted off to find his electrician, slamming the door behind him.

In that moment Chris let go of his things but placed the wire inside the mess of other cables and pulled out a flat, black box inserting the flash drive she'd given him earlier.

As Lorelei saw Jeremy Hilford Junior on the screens searching for her colleague, she put an USB drive into the computer systems as well and the copying of his internal and external hard disk progressed automatically. In short, she had his complete data, before he even reached the "electro-room". Chris also was done with installing, put back all the wires in their original place and turned around. He probably heard the loud steps on the staircase.

She watched how Junior was frantically talking to Chris, who hid his flash drive unnoticed by Junior and both hurried back to her. She pulled out the USB herself, stuck it in a plastic lined pocket of her thin jacket and fell back into the wheel chair as the door reopened and both men entranced, shock dominating their expressions. Coughing, less than at the start but still heavily and shaking fiercely she forced tears into her eyes.

'Mother! Oh my!' Chris shot forwards, taking her hands in his only to give her his flash drive. Rummaging in his bag and finally finding a dark colored bottle he sprayed it right into her mouth. Shortly afterwards she stopped coughing and watched both with watery eyes.

Still hovering close to her, Chris couldn't help but notice, how well her eye colour suited her purpose of looking like an ocean of tears would burst and drown them all. Junior leaned forwards, his expression still outraged. 'You all right, Ma'am? '

'Of course, of course. Why are you all so shocked? Did I miss a scene?' Waving one hand she signaled Chris to let go of her. 'I told him so often that ghosts don't exist but he won't listen. That's what you get when you believe in those tales, dear!' She explained, shook her head questioningly and again smiled widely at both. 'Air. I need fresh air in my lungs. May one of you be so kind and come outside with me? A woman shall never go alone in the streets, you know.'

Sweat tickled down Junior's face and he nodded shakily. Her voice

didn't sound at all fine. 'Yeah, I'll bring you out. Get on with your Job, Daniel.' The sooner he could get rid of this old woman, the better.

Chris nodded and went outside, fulfilling his duty in reading the checking the amount of electricity which flew through that house.

'Good movie. A bit boring if you ask me.' Lorelei said as they were on the plank. 'Listen, young man, ought you be as kind and bring me a cup of water? Your sudden appearance made my throat dry.'

'But please, don't frighten me again.' He didn't want a son without nerves when his mother screwed up in his house. Less he wanted police coming near him, which would happen, if she died here.

'I am sorry that I did, but I thought it'd be customary to bring guests a cup of water. I didn't want to cause you any trouble, please forgive me.' She excused.

'I'll get it.' Junior hurried inside, thinking that this woman's brain and memory had more holes than a sieve.

'Splendid!' She smiled, as he left. 'What a wonderful and large swimming pool you have! Very true-to-life!' He heard her calling after him but didn't pay any attention to her words, but through the closed door she sounded huffed.

Lorelei stood up and pushed her wheelchair over the balcony. It crashed on the stones and some parts fell into the sea water. Then she took step after step backwards until she felt the metal of the door behind her. One last, deep breath and she sprinted towards the end of the balcony. As the last inches seemed to vanish into air she jumped off.

When Junior was on his way back with a cup of water he met Chris and both went upwards chatting about the rising taxes for energy. Jeremy Hilford Junior opened the door and called out for Daniel's mother. 'I've got your water and your son wants to take you home. We hope you've enjoyed the movie.'

'So, where is she?', Chris asked as he didn't see her and glanced around an empty room. Junior opened the door to his balcony, but found it empty the same.

'Well, a few seconds ago...' A sudden thought struck him and he ran to the end of the balcony. The leftovers of a destroyed wheel chair and some sharks in the dark water beneath gave him enough clues to draw an own conclusion. He fell to his knees, pressed himself on the floor and started groaning. 'Oh... my god. No-'

13. 13

13_

They met at Cleo's at late evening under the pretense of doing homework together. They actually wanted to do their homework, but that was not the primary reason for their meeting. After Cleo had led her two friends in her room she was called downstairs by her dad.

Descending the stairs she thought about the reason for the strange tone in her father's voice.

'I didn't do anything. I swear', Rikki said as she closed Cleo's room door and switched the lights on.

'Who did it then, Rikki?' Emma sat down on Cleo's bed, threw glance at Rikki and then watched the fish diving through the water of the aquarium. They led a plain life, Emma thought. Doing nothing but breathing, swimming and eating.

'How shall I know?' Rikki retorted inquiringly. She also sat down but faced the opposite direction. 'As you have seen, the glasses haven't been hot anymore as Wilfred touched them. They were on their average temperature. Either it was a non commonplace chemical reaction, what would be very weird indeed. Or-' She paused and sighed. 'Maybe you subconsciously cooled it down, Emma. Maybe our powers are out of control. Again.'

Emma kept her eyes on the fish. They are not only breathing, swimming and eating, she noticed. They had a complex life. It seemed as if one was chasing another. A third apparently was interested in their conversation. Could they actually understand what they said? Rejecting that last thought Emma shook her head slightly. 'I doubt that. I would have noticed if I would cool something down.'

'Don't you think I'd notice it, too?', argued Rikki.

'I don't think anything. I don't believe anything. I have no idea what is going on', Emma replied and exhaled loudly, being suddenly overly exhausted. She fell back on Cleo's bed and furrowed a brow at the ceiling. 'Something goes very wrong.'

'What is that something?', Rikki mumbled. 'And what is wrong? How should it be instead?'

Cleo entered the room, a small smile playing around her lips. 'Dad thinks I messed up with someone. He'd love to prove it would be Lewis so he could scream at him.'

'You should better warn Lewis and tell him about the crime he didn't commit', Rikki said, changing subconsciously the topic to what had happened at the JuiceNet Caf  .

'She's right', Emma added. 'It might have been something different and not Rikki to heat the liquid.'

'Yeah. But who? Or what? I don't think the water is playing tricks on us just because it wants to.' Cleo threw a magazine aside and too sat down on her bed. All the three of them, facing a different direction. Emma propped up and grabbed the magazine. A dark blue cover with an overly sized full moon on front page.

'_My Horoscope   " Special Edition: The way the moon impairs our sleep', s_he read out loud, surprise and amusement in her voice. 'Oh, I didn't know you were reading such kinds of magazines.'

'No wonder, that your dad is worried about you', Rikki chuckled.

Cleo rolled her eyes. 'It's not mine. Well, in a way it is. On my way home I've seen our tutor again. She flicked through a dozen of those magazines and finally bought this one.' She pointed at Emma, who still had the paper in her lap.

'So you bought that too just to see what she reads', Emma observed and flipped through the pages to find the requested page. She inhaled and gave her voice a touch of drama. '_The moon. A mystery since hundredths of years. There rarely have been more myths about any other compound of our universe...' _At this point, she stopped reading. 'Utter nonsense', she murmured.

'Exactly. We have to be careful. She probably believes in that whole stuff. I don't want to give her autographs in the end.'

Rikki laughed. 'Sorry, I just pictured it.'

14. 14

14_

Switching on the light beside her bed Cassandra Johnson sat up sleepily and pushed away her linen. She sighed and riffled through her dark hair. After a few moments of silent consideration she rose to her feet, switched the soft light off, padded through the dark room and tried to find the door handle. Unfortunately, she hit the light switch instead and dazzling light flooded the room making her flinch away easily. As she eventually entered the living room with a fleecy green security blanket wrapped around her, Ethan Shaw, her fiancÃ©, was awake and fully dressed working on his lap top.

'Are you still awake or again?', she asked yawning as she sat down beside him.

'Again. I carried on with the book as you started mumbling in your sleep.' He smiled at her and drew her into a close hug. 'It's brightest daylight outside, dearest.'

'I am sorry.' She leaned into his embrace and yawned again. 'I didn't want to rob your sleep. The more as Tony is with your parents and we actually have time for just the two of us.'

'Authors never sleep', he replied with a small smile to ease her worries. 'Did you dream again?' He inquired. That blanket was a nearly hundred percent indicator that she had dreamed badly. '_The _dream?'

Since he knew her, he also knew that she was troubled, nearly haunted, by one specific kind of dream which repeated itself in irregular rhythms. However, she rarely talked about it. Still he mostly saw when it possessed her thoughts. First he'd assumed that it was her work giving her such dreams, but she'd reassured him by revealing that she already dreamed it since High School, which wasn't reassuring him at all.

Cassandra nodded and closed her eyes while she reached out and grabbed around his waist, resting her head on his chest. 'The two parted one, you know. First I see that girl, the fishtail girl. She calls out for me and she's happy and trusts me.' Another yawn. 'I

can't hear her voice still I know she's calling out for me. It's so bloody peaceful like best friends forever or that kind of stuff. In the next scene she is afraid of me and a human. I know it's the same girl, I don't know why but I know it. And I am quite sure the second scene is a real memory of mine. What makes it even more pointless.'

'Why is this troubling you so much, dear?' He couldn't quite see why this dream would be so mysterious. After all it was just a dream, maybe one of a fourteen-year-old dreamy girl. Yet, as far as he guessed Cassandra had never been a lot of dreamy. She was a romantic when they were alone and a bit of philosophic when she helped him with his books. But dreamy? No way.

He knew she'd practically been an orphan since birth and stayed until she was fifteen and was abducted from an orphanage. She'd disappeared for nearly a whole month and the chances to find her alive had probably sunken below the percentage of a zero percent. It made him sick to think of her being torn from him before they even met. Even more, that no one could figure out what had happened to her during that time.

Against all odds a cycler found her unconscious and with a heavy skull fracture at some picnic area close to Dover. She'd lost memory of what happened through her abduction and all medical as same as psychological tests said she'd be fine. The fracture was the worst and only hurt she'd carried away through and probably the reason why she'd lost her memory. She'd entered secret service after she was requested as personnel through a telephone company.

He'd been a journalist who earned himself barely enough money to pay the rent and secretly dreamt of writing a novel. Because of the directions of their jobs they'd met a couple of years ago and fallen in love the same moment she directed him outside an operation. A few days later she'd knocked at his front door just to say Hi and stayed ever since. Half a year later they had moved in together and if nothing bad would happen, they would be married next year in late summer.

Ethan glanced down at her.

'I can hear her voice. She's saying something, but I forget it over and over again. I want to know what she says.' Cassandra looked up at him as if he would be able to find a solution to her problem.

'It's just a dream, Cassie.' He stroked a strand of her hair back behind her ear.

'Dreams are mixtures consisting of consciously experience and unconsciously experienced reality, the same as memories and both conscious and subconscious wishes', she held against quietly but in a determined tone.

'Not everything in this world has to be reasoned, or have a clear cause. Don't let yourself be too taken by your job. There are things without reason.'

'Then how do I know that the situation with the girl is a true memory and the rest some sick and indefinable mixture of reality and wish? Which wish is it where mermaids take place? I never believed in that

stuff'', Cassandra mumbled softly against his chest.

'Maybe you watched _Arielle_ shortly before you dreamed it and projected the memories on that girl.'

'I don't watch mermaid-tales! First I believed the person with the fishtail would be me but that's impossible as I see the scene and act myself. She has a green fin, it's very well blended in the water. Camouflage might be the only correct thing in that whole story. I help her out the water and take her in my arms, like a hug. Why? Why do I dream such crap? Why do I hug a half-fish?' Maybe she actually had watched _Arielle_ before and only forgot that she'd seen the movie.

'You take her in your arms? A miniature-model-mermaid?'

'A young child', she said.

'I thought, you'd be talking of a youth. Aren't the average figures at least twelve or adults? At least they have to be old enough to fall for a human.'

'Dunno. Maybe she's in an early kindergarten-age', Cassandra guessed.

'A three year old who's able to swim?'

'She has a fin, Ethan. Of course she's able to swim.' She stopped as she realized her words. 'See, I already defend her! I defend someone who doesn't exist. That's so sick - uh!'

'And in the second part of your dream you see her _again_?'

'Yeah. Just as a human. And she's so bloody afraid of me. You may think I killed her favourite pet. I believe, I haven't been quite friendly anyway. The environment around us is pretty light and somehow cold. Not so glimmering and shimmering as first.'

'A trauma?', he asked.

'Pfh? Of what? A children's book or movie?' She chuckled. Well, it definitively would be a possibility.

'Cassandra...', Ethan sighed heavily.

'I know, I know. I shouldn't handle it like that. A month of abduction... of course I am traumatized by that, or else I'd say three weeks, four days and eight hours and would not have woken up in a hospital without any traces of injuries in exception of a quite dangerous skull fracture. I was sixteen or fifteen, whatever. Nothing happened to me in those weeks, they did every test they were able to do in this country. I am all right, Ethan. Don't worry about me', she added softly.

He didn't seem to be convinced. She sat up and took both of his hands in hers.

'There are a few things you shall never forget: First: I'll never lie to you about my emotions, nor in how much danger I am both physically and mentally. Second: I love you.' Cassandra mirrored the warm smile

spreading over his face and made his eyes sparkle. Shortly her glance slipped to his work. 'What kind of book are you writing, it's a new one - as I see.'

'You'll never guess.' Ethan grinned mischievously and Cassandra raised a brow.

'Argh, she even got you already. And you don't know that girl.'

'Wrong lead, my dear. A frog suddenly becomes human and learns that there is way more than the pond. And the humans learn to be more attentive towards their environment. A children's book', he explained being visibly proud of his idea. 'Tony inspired me. He wanted to know how why it was always the Prince changing into a frog and not the Princess or King or Queen.'

'Still, I liked your science fiction novel more. How about a crime novel?', she asked.

Ethan pretended to muse about her idea. 'Maybe, how about... um... _The non-commonplace mystery of the fishtail girl?_'

15. 15

15_

While I poured boiling water in a bowling pin shaped glass pot, the fine scent of Earl Grey tea started to spread through my living room. Carefully, I placed the heater next to the small table as soon as the pot was filled. I ignored the hot moist steam adhering every millimetre of my face and inhaled deeply directly above the pot. Then I blinked a few times and blew away the steam. It formed bizarre as same as blurry images and finally dissolved into air, becoming invisible for the human vision.

The second my phone rang - and disturbed that wonderful silence - I knew exactly why I shouldn't answer it. To speak more plainly, I knew I should answer; still I didn't want to face that encounter right now. Unfortunately, my sense of duty was stronger and I answered on the fourth ring. Yet, not without inhaling another time the odour of my calming Earl Grey. Taking the receiver with my left hand I already regretted it, because the suture on my ankle still ached, even though I wore a bandage around it. Damn cragged ocean bed.

'Jup.' No need to introduce myself. For one I knew who was calling, secondly, I never gave my name.

'You messed up a lot.' Criticizing. Chris. Maybe I should tell him about the same intonation of the word and his name.

'The plan was for me to jump.' I told him instead and took the receiver in my right hand, whilst I held my other above the fading heat steams of the pot.

'How did you get the sharks there, without them eating you up? '

'I miscalculated the depths of water and hit Davy Jones's locker with my hand, ankle and arm. Believe it or don't, the sharks came

voluntarily; it wasn't necessary to invite them to a happy dinner party. However, the sharks will make it harder for him to believe I'd be still alive, in addition to my appearance as someone quite old and handicapped.' I explained, yet not giving the full answer to his question and threw a glance at my arm. The bandage - not very beautiful but good enough to suit its purpose - covered the wound completely. It was an about ten centimeters superficial lesion, somehow serrated and surrounded by an abrasion. At least it wasn't a smooth cut, for which I was grateful - those took longer to heal completely.

'Hilford Junior wouldn't get police into it, just to save his own actions. You know it, that's why we planned your disappearance as a death. You mustn't have taken such risk on you.' He didn't seem to understand that I didn't hit that rock voluntarily. I never really understood all those swimming safety rules. Don't jump into foreign waters didn't seem to be as pointless as I always thought. Furthermore, they should amplify the rule with the adding of not to jump from lighthouses into oceans.

Though, I believe, no normal-thinking human would ever do that.

'I already send a copy of the flash drives to Canberra.' I said to distract him from the wound on my arm. 'They'll arrest Hilford tonight. It should give him enough time to remove what I left of the wheelchair. Hopefully he doesn't throw it in the ocean. For all his doomed to failure plans he should be grateful to nature he's still alive and not pollute the ocean more than it already is.' I paused shortly. 'Hanna's going to get a back up copy of the case as soon as he's nicked. I need the interrogation transcripts first.'

'Actually I wasn't talking of late afternoon.' Chris attempted to force me to explain my earlier actions. A while ago he had been better in trying to get me doing things. His lack of effect on my will allowed me to set Cold Reading on the list of things we should rehearse again soon.

'So what? That's my job, isn't it?' I replied, answering to his subtext. I shouldn't have given Hanna false hope that Chris and I would agree with each other's plans easily. 'Only the other humans shouldn't notice a thing.' I cited what he'd told me earlier. 'Accentuation on human.'

He let out a sigh. I knew Chris was ruffling his hair right now, searching for an answer and trying to remember what exactly he'd said. Next he would tell me, that I was amazingly unaccountable according to my own safety.

I cut him short on that one. 'I can take care for myself if I want. It might be a fact that you got your degree in psychology but the same have I and you too know that human brain is unable to notice everything.' As it had slipped out I regretted my words. 'I know exactly what I do, trust on it. '

I heard him exhale, resigned. As I had robbed away his first blow he would go for the most obvious coming: Next he would change issues, just to come back to this point later. I could cut him again, but I wasn't in the mood to provoke an unnecessary argument. So, I casually waited for his words to be carried through the receiver. 'Okay. You just shouldn't direct your class as you do know. Most of your

students and the other teachers already like you too much to let you go in the end of the year.'

I made a face, being glad he couldn't see it. Who knows how he would interpret it. Probably not as the urge to rip this ghastly bandage off. 'I bet Lisa wants to keep you here, too.'

'Oh, damn it. I already forgot about that', he groaned. 'I believe we had a meeting in the next few days. Seriously, as you mention it... oh, god... she'll kill me if I ask her again when we wanted to meet.'

'Give peace a chance.'

His answer startled me in its seriousness. 'There's too much distraction around.'

'Are you complaining, Doctor?' I asked lightly to change his mood, or to figure out how serious he was.

'Not at least, Doctor.' Apparently, Chris was quite serious about this distraction.

'A possible national threat is a distraction for you?' Hopefully I was wrong with my assumption, for I didn't know how to tell Hanna if he'd react agreeing. How should I tell her Chris would want to abandon his work, because he started thinking rationally?

'It's more a certain someone I don't want to name who's constantly searching for new methods to drive me mad and probably needs more protection than everyone else together.' Chris told me in playful graveness. Subconsciously I'd stopped breathing the moment he started explaining. A silence rose between us. Still I didn't seem to be capable of breathing. Silence crackled.

Here it was, get back to the actual topic in an unexpected way. He managed to settle the surprise well, I had to admit.

'Breathe.' He ordered eventually and I exhaled. 'I didn't want to shock you.'

'Maybe I don't seem to be as dangerous as I really am.' I guessed bluntly, more resentful because he assumed he'd shocked me than his whole mess he'd created before.

'Dangerous? '

'See you tomorrow. ' I hung up the phone without answering. This sentence gave away too much of what I did and didn't know about me. Not a second later my phone beeped telling me I'd received a new message.

How are you?

Arm still aches. How are you?

Concerned.

Stupid. Everything's fine.

I poured the tea into a small and somehow filigree ceramic tea cup and took a large sip and grimaced. It had rapidly cooled down during our discussion.

16. 16

16_

The second full moon in this semester came along with cooler days and nights. This time Cleo and Rikki met at Emma's. She'd promised her parents who were out in a theatre to take care of her younger brother. Elliot wasn't as glad as Emma was, for he had to stand his sister and her two best friends for the whole evening. Cleo didn't even bring Kim along, so he had not the tiniest of a chance to find distraction anywhere save in his video games. Though all video games he possessed were boring by time.

He also knew that he would have to go to bed early, because his sister was quite strict on those matters. Being impatient and bored he hit his fork on several dishes until he found a well sounding rhythm. But just as he found it, Emma took the dishes out of his reach. Annoyed he hit the table. Only as Emma grabbed his fork, he frowned and automatically reached for it. 'Ey ya', that's mine.'

No chance of getting it back, he noticed as he saw the quite stern look in her eyes. 'It's not', she replied quickly.

'Who wants hot tea? Milk? Anything else? In exception for cold drinks,' Rikki asked standing in the kitchen. 'And don't be so harsh. I liked that rhythm.'

'I didn't like it. Tea, please', called Emma.

'Me too', Cleo added. 'Both tea and rhythm.'

'I want milk', Elliot said.

'Only if you go to bed when you're finished', his elderly sister decided immediately. 'It's nearly ten.'

Pouting he gave in. 'Fine.' Not sounding fine at all.

Rikki placed four empty cups in front of her, filled them with tea and milk and made slow, swinging movements with her hand as if she'd be charming a poisonous snake. After a while she placed them on a tray and gave everyone a cup of what they'd requested.

'How did you heat the milk?', Elliot asked nosily.

'It already has been heated, otherwise I'd asked for cold milk and tea', she replied sharply, so that he wouldn't ask another question.

Emma smiled warmly at her brother to make up for her friend's prior comment. He didn't even glance up at her.

'No, no new horoscope! You're getting obsessed with these', Rikki remarked as she saw Cleo flipping through pages of a dark colored magazine.

'Well, it's not mine actually. I just lend this one. Most of the forecasts aren't true anyway. But its funny. Elliot, which sign of the zodiac is yours?'

Surprised to be mentioned, Elliot lifted his head and stopped staring at his cup of milk. 'It's Aries, I assume.'

'Let's see what Aries says...', Cleo mumbled searching for the right page. 'Here it is. First of all, you have got or Aries is the cardinal sign of fire, whatever that means. Aries says you're courageous and enterprising but also moody and impatient.'

'I am not impatient', Elliot complained. 'And not moody.'

'It doesn't have to be true, Elliot', Emma reassured him, whilst Rikki took the magazine away from Cleo and looked up her own birth date.

'Yet it's quite good what they print about me.' She muttered and didn't wait for anyone to ask but read it out loud instantly. 'Libra have a feeling for beauty, are wise, helpful and friendly.'

'I guess everyone is a bit like that', Cleo stated. 'What are the so called negative character traits?', she inquired in the same sentence.

Rikki smirked. 'We are erratic, indifferent and love to be convenient. That supposed indifference annoys me, but the rest is quite okay. And it's the cardinal sign of air, well that's quite pointless too. Why air? Fire would be a lot better. What's about you, Emma?'

'I don't want-'

'You're Gemini, aren't you?', Rikki requested, ignoring the objection.

'Yeah, but I am not interested in horoscopes. Enough you got Elliot into it.' Emma protested but was ignored as Rikki exclaimed to have found her.

'Got ya'! Your sign is the mutable sign of air.'

'I don't transform into a bird, nor did I ever want to fly.'

But Rikki was too much in it to care about Emma's objections. 'But your traits are quite adorable ones. Doesn't everyone wish to be skilful, humorous and persuasive?'

'So why I am not able to convince you to put it away?', Emma asked ironically.

'I'm too indifferent on that point.' Rikki smirked. 'Sadly, you also are restless and nervous.'

'Emma's not', Elliot replied at once. 'And you're boring. That's girl's stuff. I'll go to bed. Night, night.' He rose and left the kitchen.

'Don't forget brushing your teeth', Emma called after him

'I won't', he mumbled to himself and went upstairs.

'I either don't know what is so fascinating about that stuff, but, well, it's great distraction', Cleo admitted, wanting to show some sympathy for Elliot and Emma.

That only drew Rikki's attention to her. 'Yours also is quite well promising. You really are sensitive and reasonable and the negative features don't fit on you, so we may skip them. And your sign is... um, wait... Cancer has the cardinal sign of water.' She threw a meaningful glance at Cleo. 'That should count for something, don't you think?'

'I am not sure', she mumbled uncertainly, grabbed the magazine and closed it. 'I have to bring it back to library tomorrow. We have other issues anyway.'

Rikki sighed as Emma pulled a folder from somewhere and opened it.

'I've drawn a chart,' she said and placed a sheet of paper in the middle of them. 'Here, four columns. One for every one of us and an extra for general things.'

'Emma, you cannot write down what happens to us! If someone ever finds this', Rikki cut in, being slightly angry.

'I like the idea', said Cleo and read through Emma's notes. The space below their names was filled with events, that did not fit in their world. A shudder ran down Cleo's spine as she read "School Waterdrop". The first note below Rikki's name was "JuiceNet". However singular they were, both problems appeared like the beginning of something far worse. They had noticed other weird developments. Emma's ice which melted as soon as she let go of it. The sprinkler which turned at just anyone walking past, but especially when it were the girls standing close. Cleo's dolphins splashed more than usually. Zane, who had saved Rikki just in time not to stumble over a bucket standing on the side of the school's hall way.

Lewis had discovered that the last full moon had not been visible at all. And this one, never lurking through the averagely thin layer of clouds, would turn out to be the next thing to add to their "strange-thingy-list".

It was quite obvious where this list lead to. Neither water nor powers listened to them as they used to. It was more like chance that what should happen actually happened. 'It's quite a lot', mumbled Cleo.

'I have an idea', said Rikki, her voice grave and hence drew her friends' attention on her. 'As soon as the next weird thingâ€¦ occurs, we are going to pause.'

'You want us to give up?' Emma asked horrified.

'No! Of course not. Just, take care, precautions, or however you want to call it: No swimming at all. We just do nothing. We won't give the water a chance to mislead us â€" until we found an explanation. Or

Miss Chatham, she always knows what's going on.'

'But-'

'Cleo! You have seen how Mako looked today, haven't you?' Rikki hissed at her. 'Iâ€¦ I am sorry', she excused weakly. 'But didn't you have to think for at least one second of the mess Doctor Baywatch left behind? The traces in the sand? The crater? Our hidden crater? I never ever want to be so helpless again. We hide away and that's it.'

Shocked about Rikki's outburst Cleo kept silent. After a few seconds Emma cleared her throat. 'Iâ€¦ we can look for Miss Chatham. She surely will help.' A bit hesitant Emma reached for her notes and folded them. 'That's sorted then.'

Cleo's glance fell on Emma's biology folder. 'Gosh, have you already done your homework?', she asked automatically, remembering a quite difficult task. As it happened Lewis was in an advanced course where she and Emma and Rikki stuck with the basic one. She thought about changing classes by the end of the year, if her grades were good enough.

'No, I haven't even read the task', Rikki said disinterestedly. 'There are really greater problems bothering me.'

'Yeah, it was simple', Emma replied the same moment.

'And what should we do? I thought it wasn't simple.'

'Something about the process of osmosis', explained Emma. 'Do you know, that water animals are isotonic to the water around them, so they won't burst, if they stay underwater for a longer period of time?'

'Does that mean, that our cells change from hypertonic to solutes to isotonic to water the very moment we change?', Cleo asked bewildered.

'That's crazy', mumbled Rikki. 'But maybe we aren't long enough under water and our cells can cope the average pressure and the process of osmosis isn't strong, say, there isn't much water molecules passing into our skin.'

'We may ask our biology teacher how it would be.' Cleo supposed. 'We don't have to- you know. Not like that.'

'Better not, just imagine it. One hypothetical question, Miss Jonas. What about mermaids? Wouldn't they burst if they dive too long? Or shrink into raisins as soon as they touch land again?'

Emma couldn't stop grinning about the imagination what would happen if they'd actually ask such a kind of question. 'I bet, it would at least be an interesting discussion.'

A week later, on an early Friday morning, it finally rained. As all streets lay dark a mild drizzle set in, only visible through light cones which were sent to spread their reassuring brightness by various street lamps. But by time the sun rose and a new day dawned the rain had increased badly; now hammering against windows and on roofs with violent force. Like it wanted to break down the fragile glass into millions of shreds, just to follow them suit and enter any house itself.

Some were brave enough encountering the rain with an umbrella, yet it would take a good, in no way transparent rain coat not to be soaked through in the first ten seconds.

Christian Brown was close to lock the door behind him and head off for school as he heard something cracking deafeningly and reflexively winced. It sounded as if someone who had way too much energy would throw his furniture through the rooms and break down every single wall by jumping against it. Like the two Gauls Asterix and Obelix encountering some Roman legion.

Just as he hoped it was over, again something cracked up and this time glass broke into pieces. Instantly he wondered what it could be. Had the rain finally broken a window? But what had been the other noise? Then something snapped and the single outdoor light went out. He still had the key in his hands, a great black umbrella next to him, leaning on a heavy bag.

The sudden silence following the prior noise reminded him of a blasting they had once done, blowing up an idle as same as rusty cruise liner to see how metal bars would fly and which possibilities of access they would have. Through the years he had come to the conclusion that any explosions where Peter's favourite disasters as he virtually re-enacted the scenes and came up with a complete procedure twenty minutes later.

He cursed inwardly, pushed the door open, hung his jacket in the semi dark on a hook behind it and searched for a flashlight, torches, anything which would enlighten the flat more than the meagre daylight could.

Having a rather small than tall beam of light he passed his relatively huge kitchen and tried to open the door to his living room by pushing away whatever lay behind it. He already suspected that he could skip the class he had today as he finally broke through.

A cold cloud of dust greeted and surrounded him as soon as he managed to open the door so much to be able to entrance and see what had happened. A hole of the size of a four-by-four ornamented the ceiling. On the floor lay scattered several parts of what intentionally should have been stuck somewhere in the flat roof. The small, transparent living room desk made of glass didn't exist anymore, but its shreds had mixed with the rest of the furniture which had once been there. The same had seemingly happened with the couch, being buried under dust and housetop. The single cupboard in that room had fallen down, pieces of the roof in its hind side, like it had been stabbed with insulation. Books, cups and his prior half filled tea pot had fallen out and were spilled over the floor, partly trashed by roof parts. The wall seemingly spit out loose wires. He unwillingly thought of shock-headed Peter's nails by the sight of it and shuddered. In a wire loop hung cardboard. Some over-lefts of

the electrical supplemental box where somewhere mixed into the chaos of roof, furniture and room.

Fortunately, it was just the living room, the one-storey-part of his flat and not the kitchen, which would have included his bedroom in a storey above and a lot more of damage.

He shut the door behind him, exhaling the first time since he'd opened it, secretly was glad it didn't break out of its ankles and looked for his phone until he remembered having it left on the glass table in his living room. Knowing it hadn't any point wanting find it by digging himself through that mess, he sighed and searched for his mobile phone inside the pocket of his dark suit instead. After he found it he cancelled the lesson he had today.

As soon as he had finished the nerve-racking chat he heard a silent but constant beeping out of his pocket. After a few seconds he fastened the device behind his ear. 'What are you doing? Stop that noise, please.'

'Getting your attention.' She replied in her used to casual manner, in the same second that annoying beeping stopped. 'I just heard you won't attend lessons today. I thought you'd have left the age of making blue behind you.' He heard the voice of his colleague through the small piece and somehow knew she would use this situation to tease him on later occasions, whenever these occasions would come.

'I don't see any point in leaving home. Have you ever felt like anything crashes down on you?' he asked.

'Literally or metaphorically?' she requested.

'Um... both, I'd say.', answered he dryly. 'If the rain doesn't stop in the next few hours I might use my living room as a swimming pool.'

'That... sounds bad.' she said slowly.

'I have no electricity either. As soon as the weather calms I'm going to repair the worst lacks.'

'I'll visit you tonight and help you. You wouldn't miss a lot anyway. Our three aren't going to come. To be honest, it would be stranger if they came than to stay at home. About seven, is that fine with you?'

'Yeah, a promise?'

'A threat.' Her smile sounded through the device and as he wanted to reply his torch gave up.

'Damn it.' He exclaimed.

'I shouldn't come?' She instantly asked.

'No- it wasn't about you. You haven't got any batteries, have you?' He asked and shook his torch in hope the missing light only would be the consequence of a loose contact. Nothing happened.

'Why?'

'My torch just died without saying goodbye. At home I'd have emergency beams but here...'

'Yes, at home; no, not at this home. So I have none in the end, sorry. It's going to dawn soon. You'll need light again when the clock strikes eight past meridian. Good luck then.'

'Thanks, you too.'

18. 18

18_

_ 'Oh, I really hope we're not too eye-catching.' Cleo mumbled and fell back on her bed, the receiver in her hands._

_ 'What do you mean by eye-catching?' asked Rikki, repeating the last word doubtfully. They had been extremely during the last week and had done nothing but hide and Emma just had to add three new points to her list, which were little in comparison to a fortnight ago._

_ 'We're missing again. All the three of us. Someday someone is going to notice something.' She guessed. 'Kim, of course, suspects anything.'_

_ 'Ah, no one ever takes care about who's attending classes and who's not.' Rikki tried to calm her._

She didn't know about Lisa Rowen planning to make an attempt on her tutor's being on duty. It suited her that the three girls missed again, she wouldn't have cared a lot naturally, but it was her chance to decently cause some problems that Dorset would have to solve on her own. Make her insecure in some way, less easy go with her colleagues, whatever... just to catapult her outside her range of being a competitor. For ever, if possible.

Lisa Rowen, secretary of Gold Coast High for five years now, waited until Lorelei Dorset had sat down and was deeply busy with some test papers she checked. Then she gained all her bravery, there was something about that woman what made it difficult to judge her, and straightly went to her. It was a minor victory that she stood, whereas the teacher sat down, making her way smaller in height.

'Three of your students announced being ill today.' Seeking for some help, even though she knew what she'd say next, she glanced at the piece of paper in her hands. 'Um... Emma Gilbert, Cleo Sertori and Rikki Chadwick. They're absent. Again.'

'I know; thank you for telling me that it actually is an illness and no other cause', The other woman shortly smiled up at her, before resuming to her work.

'Well, thisâ€¦ I didn't confirm anything. They're being absentâ€¦. this isn't normal. It can't be.' Lisa added growing more demanding as she spoke, yet didn't receive the success she'd expected.

Her counterpart remained politely interested, still sounding slightly bored. 'Why do you think it's abnormal? Some illnesses only occur under specific weather situations.'

Though Lisa swallowed down a sharp comment on this naïveté her glance gave her thoughts away. As Lorelei Dorset wrote something down in the faint blue register, probably noting who didn't attend class this day, a genuine smile spread over her features.

Ha, as if you already knew, they'd be absent today!

She sighed, closed the class-register with a silent snap and Lisa felt a sudden wave of guilt, having her misjudged. At the moment there was no obvious reason she could see not to like her. She was just a teacher, after all. Human and incomplete at some moments.

'It's not that easy to judge over, sadly', giving her thought sound as though reading her mind, yet relating to another issue. 'Years ago I've been a child too and it was all horrible with me. Every time the temperature would rise over thirty degrees Celsius, not Fahrenheit obviously, I suffered headache and bad stomach disorders... however, not a nice story.' Shaking her head, she cleared her throat and adjusted her glasses. 'Fortunately, we rarely have those really hot days in England.'

Again Lisa knew why she didn't like her. It wasn't the job, it was personal. Lorelei Dorset weakened her arguments and just was more confident in every way than herself and if it was only about the absentees of students in her classes.

'You don't have those problems now?' Lisa asked in a polite tone.

As the interest came, it seemed to fade rapidly. Or maybe, she didn't want to talk about her health problems. 'Drugs. Medicine improved in many ways since then.'

Hearing that reply she thought the conversation ended, turned away to go back to her desk, where she'd be in control of really everything. 'Give it to your students then,' she muttered.

She was surprised that Lorelei Dorset heard it, less that she commented it. 'Chuntering will do no one no good. I can't administer them something blindly. It cures heat no hundred percent atmospheric humidity.'

Being dazzled by that she turned back to her, stepping backwards the same moment. 'What?'

'One has to take the correct medicine to cure the occurred cause. It would be worse if I knew my class would write a test today. As we don't, why overact so badly? I'm going to talk to them anyway. Do you have access to their internal telephones?' Her eyes sparkled as she asked this, as if she'd wanted to add something even more specific.

Or it was her choice of words, which was too simple at some times and too complicated at others. But if she thought about that issue correctly every language teacher displayed that annoying inconsistent

feature. She wanted to know everything and be in control of everything, like it had been those peaceful years before.

'Eh? I am sorry... um... what shall I know?' Knowing every word she said, didn't mean knowing what she meant. _Inscrutable woman!_

Having literally a patience of Job Lorelei Dorset explained all the misconceptions. 'Would you please be as kind and give me the three phone numbers I need?'

'Yeah. Of course.' A second time in a few minutes Lisa turned around, but this time the Literature teacher followed her - a second small victory, she knew something Lorelei Dorset didn't know;_ Ha! Finally!_ - and waited opposite her large desk, carefully not intruding Lisa's space.

'Aren't their numbers in the register?' Lisa requested

The teacher glanced backwards. 'Oh, that's no register. My schedule for marks... lower grade. Though I'd like to know where that book hides away. Like _Anderson's_ book, I put it away in a hurry once and never found it again.'

'Okay.' Mh, she was in mood to talk today. Maybe she could use it to get anything out of her. Later, not now...

he waited patiently as Lisa searched through the school intranet, wrote down the few numbers and then Lisa watched her going back to her desk, shortly stopping at the electric kettle. She set it on, filled herbs in a tea ball, closed the metal and put it into a black cup. An average tea bag probably would be too much to ask for her. She placed the cup on her desk and dialled the first number. That's it, Lisa thought. Maybe she hadn't had that crap medicine today and that's why she was easier to understand.

_Cleo just sat down in front of the TV in her pyjama and started zapping through the programs as the phone rang. She tuned off and lazily went for it. _

'Hello? Sertori.'

'Dorset here.'

Immediately she stood upright and subconsciously she swallowed, unable to say a word. Why did she call?

'Your tutor as you should remember.' _She heard through the receiver after a long silence, making her realize she should say something. Something which made sense._

'Oh, em... Good morning.' Cleo squeaked, still being startled.

'Too many clouds for a truly good morning...'

Something exploded in the background and Cleo jumped back and exclaimed a 'What was that?'

_For a few seconds she didn't receive an answer. As she heard it, she

would swear that her tutor smiled._ 'Well, the kettle bursted. Apparently.'

_'The kettle exploded?' she requested in a still too high and choked voice. _

'Must have overheated. Bloody electronics. Excuse me for a few seconds.' _Her voice sounded far away. _'It is but a kettle. A bunch of plasticâ€|'

'Oh.' She heard some voices but couldn't understand what they said. Someone shouted. 'Flying cattle. Retreat.' A male voice. Shortly after that call she heard a desperate 'Linguists. Curse them.' She guessed it was the school's secretary.

'Good morning then.' _The background noise piped down. A deep sigh followed._ 'I was told that you, say, you and your two best friends already missed a few lessons. Strangely, never singular, but every time the three of you. Which means same date, same hour.'

Emma kept her glance at a picture beside the phone. 'I didn't notice that.', she attempted to lie. 'It... must be by chance. Every time. Somehow.' Unfortunately, it didn't sound very convincing, not even to her own ears. As her tutor answered she didn't get a word, because a rumble made her nearly inaudible. 'I am sorry. May you please repeat what you just said? I listened, but it was loud around you.'

'I wanted tea. An electric kettle blasted a few minutes ago and probably no one saw a kettle before.'

'Why? A kettle?' she asked, before she noticed that she probably shouldn't ask such a thing. It may run too personal. And it did.

'Maybe it didn't want to get oppressed anymore. For heaven's sake, it's just a kettle and not the school.'

'Sorry.' Emma excused quickly.

'I told our secretary, you'd be sick. Though I expect a written excuse from your parents or a doctor until Monday, unasked. If it's not Monday, whenever you're going to be back at school again. Because I want to make sure that you actually have been ill and don't... skip my classes for no peculiar reason.'

'Even skipping classes has a reason.' Rikki interrupted. Damn your big mouth, she scolded herself.

'It also might be the weather, even though I honestly recommend you to skip classes when the sun is shining, that's way more fun.'

'Of course it's because of this fantastic weather. What else did you expect?' Double damn it.

'I am curious to hear your suggestions.' _Her tutor replied alluringly. Her irritation faded abruptly and she was close to actually give an honest answer, as her thoughts were interrupted. '_You don't have to answer this truthfully, Rikki, it was a rhetorical order. Get well soon.'

_ 'Yeah, goodbye then.' Rikki mumbled puzzled by her own reaction, cut the call off instantly and dialed Emma's number. 'Did she call you too?' She asked as soon as she heard, that someone took the receiver._

_ 'Rikki? Is that you?' Her mom asked and Rikki silently cursed herself._

_ 'Yes, Mrs. Gilbert. Can I talk to Emma, please? '_

_ 'One sec, she's upstairs.' _

19. 19

19_

_ Dear Diary, _

_ I don't even know why I am writing. What do people normally write? What do average people write? Why do they write? Are they bored? Have a huge amount of time? Experienced something good? Bad? Something they can't explain? _

_ Maybe then I should be writing for years, since I was nine, or nine years and a few months old. Or a year, not to exaggerate things. I am ten now, but will be eleven tomorrow. So, if I would write tomorrow it nearly would be years._

_ Yes, maybe people start writing diary because they want to share their secrets. Secrets they can't share with anyone else, not even with their closest family members. No one, which really means no one. Nor some stranger, who'd give you a get-a-therapist-and-do-not-bore-me look and walk past shaking his or her head. Who knows. Well, I don't even want to know._

_ I said something about secrets, actually I said nothing at all, but I mentioned secrets and I want to share some secrets. Some may think, it's me being a relatively good singer. A secrets stops being a secret as soon as you tell someone else about it. According to that this is none, if it has never been one._

_ The secret is a little bit more complicated and less average. Yet, I don't want to mention it, because I promised someone not to mention it and actually to burn everything I have about it and will have about it. Or did she make me promise it? I am not sure._

_ However, I will note some keywords, only understandable for special, very special people: Ireland. Moon. Water bubbles._

_ As I said, I have been nine and extremely curious. (The only difference to today is that I am ten.) And my parents have been away for a couple of days and trusted me surviving alone. So I explored the nearby surroundings of our town on my own. At some late time, it already has been night outside, I arrived at some dark cave filled with water. it formed something like a pool, a moon pool I learned hours later. And the water seemed to be quite inviting, maybe seductive - this sounds strange I know, but it was like whispering "come with me" -, so I jumped into it, made it splash against the rocky walls. That was funny, but then the mystery about it started.

And tiny, and bigger water bubbles floated upon the air into the moonlight shining from above. Beautiful. I couldn't describe it and still can't. It was just amazing. Breathtaking. That has been my last night as an average, boring girl. Things very well changed. Not only things._

I said it was a secret. I told no one. That part is true, I never told anybody but someone found it out. Still, I can't say for sure how Leslie, or Lizzy (?) knew. She knew and that is everything what mattered. It indeed would have been horrible if she wouldn't have known.

_She was a student from London, close to finish school and hoping to soon study medicine and wanted to earn some extra money through baby-sitting in her semester holidays to pay rent for her future flat (she didn't find any flatmate, because they considered her as boring, lame and extremely choosy - I only can guarantee for the last of her features). She saved me, in some way. I didn't know it then, realized it later though. _

_I've been out in the park, when some water sprinkler turned to me. She pulled me away and quickly gave me her jacket and told me (quite commanding) to dry me at once. As I hesitated she did it. I thought she was crazy and shouted at her to let go of me and ran away. As I turned around to see whether she'd follow me, she'd disappeared.

—

_At home I noticed why she did it. The exact moment I realized what she'd done was when I turned the shower on and waited for the water to grow warm. I fell headlong into the tub. I turned. Changed. Whatever. And I am glad she did help me, because I don't know how the people in the park would have reacted. _

But I am naturally curious and went to the park the next day again. I didn't see her at first, but then she appeared through the park gates. Before asking for her name (I am certain now, it was Lizzie - short for Elizabeth), I asked her how she could possibly know things about me I didn't know. She replied she'd do researches on that peculiar half-island (she called it moon-pool-peninsula) and knew what could happen, the reason she missed any kind of water at full moon nights. She wanted to stay normal, she said. But sometimes she wanted to see the water bubbles rise, so she had seen me jumping into the pool that night.

_She told me a lot more, so she apparently knew a lot about me. And then she told me, I should keep it a secret, because, if she was able to find out about the mysteries of that moon pool other people would have this idea, too. She only smiled after telling me this but I know what she didn't want to say. Yet, other people wouldn't be kind and protect me. That's why (and because of her knowledge) I asked her, to become a nanny for a few days for me, the time my parents mainly would be away. She could then earn a bit of that extra money she needed and help me to learn the most important things. Sadly, she only stayed exactly one week and went home without really saying goodbye. _

_But the situation has been weird anyway. We've been out in the park as the sky darkened suddenly. We'd watched weather forecast, but it had said nothing about rain. So, we'd been out without any protective rain coats or umbrellas and only on foot. I didn't notice anything at

first, but she suddenly exclaimed (outraged somehow, as if she'd blame the weather forecast) that it would start raining. _

And it rained! From one to the next second it started raining horribly. We had started running towards an old caravan, which stood at the end of the meadow as long as I can remember. As we reached it, she looked pale and somehow strained. She unbuttoned her jacket and handed it to me as a towel. She only wore a top now, it made her even paler. I was afraid she would faint, anyhow she ensured me it wasn't as bad as it looked. The rain had been unexpectedly cold and I was glad to get rid of the wet raindrops. Then I noticed I'd lost my bracelet and mentioned it without thinking about any consequences. Lizzie ran back and I crawled under the caravan to watch her. As she didn't find it, she glanced upwards the sky and held both hands next to her body, like rebuking the rain for all the misery. The next moment a lightning hit her. Or I thought it hit her, but it couldn't have hit her, because she stood again after sliding through the mud.

I don't know how we got home. Somehow we did. We didn't talk a lot. Lizzie's hand temperature changed between cold and warm every minute but I was too frightened to let go of her hand. Mum and Dad were angry, because I was so muddy and we have been out in a dangerous thunderstorm without any protection. Dad claimed Lizzie had been irresponsible. He'd heard a growling thunder and thought it would explode right over them. She excused and said she'd have to go home by herself now otherwise she'd miss the train. She didn't even try to explain what had happened and I wanted to say, she'd nearly been hit by the lightning whose thunder he'd heard but she shook her head. I believe she was sad. That was the last I saw of Lizzie. She turned around and disappeared into the rain.

Later the same evening, before going to bed I found the bracelet in the bathroom. I hadn't lost it, but only noticed I hadn't it after we'd hidden away behind that old car.

I promised her to burn the pages I wrote, write and will write about my secret. But only if she would remember me at a special time. She claimed no one voluntarily would be her flatmate. As I suggested I'd move in with her she laughed and said I was cute. If she found someone to be her ideal flatmate and get me a notice about it, I'd burn everything I'd have written. Keep my secret for myself. I believe she won't remember me. More precisely, she maybe will remember me, but probably not the promise. It has been more a joke, anyway.

Sometimes I wish she would have been more like me. I mean, I haven't met anybody who's like me. It's crazy. I am lying to everybody, yet how should I break the truth without sounding completely insane? It would have been funnier if we both could have dived along the coast and if she wouldn't have only watched the whole time. But maybe we both would have had great problems that last evening in the park.

Excited to write more,

Bella

Isabella Hartley carefully tore out the first three pages of her diary. It where the only pages she'd ever jotted something down. She

folded them slowly, one after another and placed them in a glass bowl. This morning a postcard had arrived, after years, no sender, only receiver given and four single words written on it.
Prospective _Flatmate Found. Thanks._

Her parents had asked her about the sender. If she knew who'd written it. If she knew what those words meant. Bella had only taken it and went into her room without explaining anything. She'd never expected to get a note from her former savior again. Yet, here it was and now she had a promise to keep.

20. 20

20_

Tiny rain drops captured the darkness under the dim lights of street lamps and send yellowish sparkles off bouncing through their immediate environment. It seemed as if the heavy rain of Friday morning would finally end up in a light drizzle by night. Loaded up with lots of paper bags wrapped into a waterproof chemical plastic, she rang by seven at his door bell. Somewhere off a church bell announced the time. Its sixths bounces floating through the murky night as the door finally opened.

'Gosh, come in, before you're dissolving.'

'Got myself wrapped up, besides I am no sugar', Lorelei replied trying to step forward and upwards the same, without tripping over the threshold or her own feet.

'No objection.' He took off the bags, wiped the water layer away with his sleeve and looked for some visible trademarks. 'You bought candles?'

She shook the raindrops away from her heavy raincoat and he involuntarily stepped away not to be hit by the cold wet.

'You were claiming', she hung her dropping rain coat on the hooks behind the door, 'you'd need light. It gives warmth the same.' A smile fitting her words.

'Then I'd probably need torches. I never managed to buy myself a lighter.'

She put off her gloves, laid them on the window bank and pointed vaguely at the bags. 'Bought some too. They are, well, somewhere... down there.'

'Where have you got that waistcoat from? I've got the same!' She shot his exclamation a naïve puzzled look, knowing it would make him feel uncomfortable. 'Sorry. Um, what I meant was... It suits you', Chris stated eventually.

'It's yours', she said, smiling succinctly.

'Mine?' He was shocked.

Lorelei tucked a fluff from the fabric with her thumb and index finger, before meeting his eye. 'Obviously, yes.'

'I didn't take it down to Australia.'

'Well, I did', Lorelei shortly grinned at him. 'Oh! Come on. Don't be mad. I like it: It's quite warm, has a nice colour. Also you said... it suits me.' She'd caught him.

He gave an amused smile. 'Have you got more of my clothes, I don't know about?'

'Which are the ones you know about?'

Pointing at her. 'My waistcoat you're wearing.'

'A scarf, the grayish, it's so adorably soft. How could you not notice it missing? One day I was frightened to already have handed it back to you. Luckily I hadn't. Two t-shirts, at least. They're great as night gown, so tall, you know? Mh, what else? Let me think... your gloves. I should give them back to you on next occasion, they are too large.'

Fifteen minutes and a short discussion about the morality of wearing his clothes later they had enlightened the whole floor - in exception of the destroyed living room - with about fifty-something night-lights.

'How is your arm?', he asked noticing the longitudinal, quite disorderly wound bandage, she most obviously had done by herself. A small smile crept up his lips, she'd probably been too proud showing she had any bad injury at school - probably hidden it away with a long sleeved jacket - and just did it, because she liked to escape just another moral speech of his.

'Way better than last week, it's nearly completely healed. Hopefully it'll be gone off in the next few days. But as you're asking I assume that bandage is quite nonsense still wearing it.'

'You hope so,' he thought. 'Better to wear 24/7 and not only one hour a day. If at all. 'Shall I have a look at your wound? As some kind of a never promoted medic?'

'Medic, assistant of high banker, psychologist, spy... Are there some jobs in this world you didn't... do?' As she noticed she couldn't change the topic she gave an annoyed sigh. 'No comments on healing process, but you may show me how to do such a bloo- bandage.' She sat down and stretched out her arm, resting it on the table.

'As the day passed, I pinned film below the hole. Actually the whole ceiling is film by now. Let's hope it won't break again until the rain entirely stopped.' Chris de-winded the gauze and threw it into a bin under the sink. 'You should take care the wound won't open again. It won't be harmful in the first instance, of course not, yet, then you'll have to wear a bandage all day and not just when you come to visit me.' He ignored her stern glare, for giving away he had noticed what she didn't want to tell him. 'If, and just in case it happens, the wound opens again by mistake or not, you're going to see a real doctor and get this throughout examined, won't you?'

'Everything's damaged, isn't it?' She asked pointing with her other hand at the living room door.

'Lorelei?' , he insisted. No escape.

'Fine. I promise you, I will take care of my arm and myself. I will even go and see a doctor if you want', she murmured and then watched how he did the new bandage with a lot more of experience than she could have ever done.

'Don't promise it to me, promise it to yourself.'

'I won't keep it then, you know.' When he was done, he handed her unused gauze. 'What shall I do with it? I have several ones by myself.'

'Wind this bandage around my arm. See it as an exercise on a living and complaining model.' The way he stressed that tiny conjunction she was sure he would complain if she wouldn't do the bandage properly.

'I can change a bandage very well. Maybe neither well nor good, but I can do it and that's fair enough. Your father is a, no, the head doctor in Glasgow, so you're practically born into this stuff and I am not. But I can do it in a still effective way. You're acting ridic-', seeing the look in his eyes she hesitated. 'Okay. Hand me your arm. You have been warned.'

Chris chuckled. 'If you don't stop the blood running through my veins by mistake or on purpose, you even may light the last candle.' With ease he avoided her fist, aiming at his shoulder.

'It's an ambiguous honour, you grace me with. I am impressed, Doc.' After she was done, Lorelei enlightened the long candle and placed it on the dinner table. She couldn't suppress an angry whisper he luckily didn't hear. Or was generous enough not to comment on it.

'Not everything has been damaged.' He answered on her earlier question and glanced at the bandage on his arm. 'Acceptable.' Chris took two glasses from a cupboard, they clinked together, opened the fridge and stared into it. The coldness was already fading. 'Mh... Shiraz. African or Australian?'

'Considering where we are, I'd choose the latter.'

He filled the glasses and brought them to the dinner table. 'How about ice cream as dessert or dinner? Depends on what else we find. Maybe even something to cook.' They actually found pasta and a dose of tomatoes.

'You said there's no electricity. And the way your house looks I am quite certain that there is not even a spark.'

'There isn't. But I've got something better: It's a gas heater.' He was surprised as she backed away by mention of the heater.

'Sorry, to unload the cooking completely on you then, but I don't touch this herd. An electrical kettle already flew around me earlier. That's enough surprise for one day.'

'A kettle, you said?' He turned around just to see her sitting

straight on a chair, as if she was uncomfortable with seating.

'I am glad it wasn't the microwave and now I'm going to search for your water - nonsense - your phone.' She rose.

'Be careful.' He called after her.

'According to what? The rest of furniture or me?'

'According to your luck today: both.'

He heard her laugh and after a while of silent preparing dinner and a few moments he thought, the house would completely crash, she entered the kitchen again, his phone in one hand. 'Might not work anymore.' She took a deep breath and sighed deeply. 'Couldn't smell better in Italy. Have you ever been there?'

'No, have you?' In a fluent movement Chris unwrapped his bandage and threw it into the dustbin.

She shook her head, commenting on his action as well as question. 'You're unfair. You're allowed to take it off but force me to keep mine on.' Her eyes narrowed pointing out this kind of injustice.

'I doubt, someone would be able to force you in doing something.'

'Then it's your condemned way giving me a bad conscience. Talking of forcing, I got you a book.' She folded the empty bags, put them under the sink and pulled out a book.

'What is it about?'

'Ovid's Ars Amatoria, book one to three in English. I didn't want to give you the Latin version.'

As she mentioned it, she probably had considered giving him the Latin version at some point. 'Okay, and why?' He took the book and flipped through the pages.

'Shall help, I've heard.'

He opened a random page and started reading. 'I don't want to stalk you.' He said after scanning through the page.

'You shouldn't try it on me, anyway! Furthermore Ovid's ideas wouldn't work on...' As if suddenly realizing what she'd just given away about herself, she returned to reality and discreetly cleared her throat. 'Helpful for honey-trapping.'

He flipped further. 'This rather sounds like hunting than anything else.'

'Well, I am using them for lessons, however, just if you're interested.' She continued setting the table and was about to comment that an old Italian opera missed playing a gramophone or something like that as the door bell cut her off.

'Bad luck, I just wanted to ask you to join me for a candle light dinner.' He teased good-heartedly.

'Yeah, how bad. Maybe it's just some musician playing live music on a violin.' As she was closer to the entrance than him she headed for the door. She went silently though, since it would sound strange if steps emerged, disappeared, just to re-emerge again. In addition she had no official reason to be here and wanted to avoid misunderstandings or unuseful chatter. She threw a glance through the door spy and decided it was correct not wanting to open the door. It may lead to false evidence if she actually would do it.

Placing a casual smile on her face she went back. 'Your guest, I may assume. Hence, it might be better for me to leave.'

'Lorelei, you all right?'

She nodded - maybe too distinct. Then she made a gesture for him to pass. 'It's not very customary to let wait your visitor. And it still rains.'

A little bit puzzled by her sudden change of mood, even though she'd try to hide it, he took a candle with him let her push him to the entrance to open the door.

'Hi, hope you don't mind such a late visit.'

He had to consider for a moment who was standing in front of him. Rowen. Lisa Rowen. School secretary. 'Lisa. Of course not.' He took a deep breath to gain time and control his expression.

'You didn't attend school today, so I thought to have a look after you.' It still rained a bit, he noticed.

'Great.' He put the candle on the windowsill and following one of his habits, stuffed Lorelei's gloves into her raincoat. 'I only believe, there's much trouble at the moment.' A friendly smile passed through the darkness, masking natural suspicion. 'There's a lot to do for me, because the roof crashed and everything looks like one great mess.' He shrugged.

The following silence gave him the involuntary chance to listen into his flat. Something moved. Instantly he let go of the door and hurried back into his kitchen, just to see the living room door was slightly opened. He pushed it completely open. Of course it was dark and rain drummed on the film; just at one corner, there where the ladder stood, the duct tape had been removed and, as he supposed been pinned from the upper side. Probably, she'd found a solution.

'Why did you leave the door ajar? You're not that thoughtless?', he asked himself, unable to find an answer.

He heard steps behind him. 'Oh, this is gorgeous. You didn't know I was coming, did you?'

He was close to tell her this wasn't meant for her, said nothing in the end but decently let Ovid's thoughts disappear into some drawer. Ars Amatoria. Had she actually planned Lisa showing up tonight? 'Forecast.' He smiled. Glanced back into the foyer. Only the second coat would give away he couldn't have been alone.

****The Ovid-lines Lewis quotes are from Book II, Part VIII: Favour Her and Compliment Her. The complete headings run the following: Book I Part XVII: Tears, Kisses, and Take the Lead; Book I Part XVI: Promise and Deceive.****

****All the best,****

****GM&I****

21_

As in previous rainy days and nights they had started to call each other regularly, even more when a full moon was involved, Lewis had begun to tinker with media and electronics. Hence, he turned up with a massive improvement this very night. After hours of receiving eye rolls from Cleo, frowning from Emma, sarcastic snorts from Rikki and worried glances from his parents for his so called wasted time Lewis had assembled a video conference for all of them. Though, again when he told them a video conference was more secure than phone calls, he earned more humorous disdain than sincere approval from Rikki. So they'd shut it down after agreeing to meet on Sunday as soon as the rain would stop and the sun was up. Whatever came later.

It seemed luck was in their favor as it was barely eight when the rain faded entirely away and left the sun to do the drying. The girls already came together at Cleo's and at least waited for Lewis to catch up with what happened last Friday. As much as they knew, he'd been somewhere else and would join them later. Not half an hour had passed when one of the cell phone's rang and Rikki answered it promptly.

However, the first thing she heard was not Lewis' voice or anything close to the voice she had expected to be Lewis'.

It rather was a metallic blaring, several female voices coming from a speaker and a somewhat strange music, probably the car' radio. Instinctively she flinched a bit away. Still some distorted noise made it to her ear. She could even make out a complete sentence. Something with Friday nights blubbered through the receiver.

'Gosh, Lewis, turn down that crap.' Shortly after Rikki heard a distinctive bustling and then Lewis voice. She now held the phone next to her ear, being sure no metallic voices would come through it this time.

'Sorry, we're just flipping through the channels and we didn't...' He stopped talking in the mid-sentence. 'Where are you anyway?'

'Cleo's. Was kind of torture getting here but getting up Sunday mornings must be worth something.'

He waited a while. 'Um... Okay. Meet you there. Ash is with me. Is it okay with Cleo's parents?'

'You're late. They are out and took Kim with them.'

'We'll be there in ten.' He said and the line went dead

immediately.

'Lewis took Ash with him. Who knows what they plotted.' Rikki eventually informed her two friends.

Actually, they made it in eight minutes and offered them a great distraction for the weekend. The moment Lewis and Ash had explained their idea to invite the girls for a festival on Sunday late evening and waited for a - hopefully agreeing - reply from them, Emma came up with the sudden urge to go swimming. 'Wanted to go swimming. You coming with me?' Cleo shook her head, she rather wanted to figure out the exact time and place of that festival.

'Nah, have to wait here and make good impression so Dad lets me go tonight.' Cleo finally answered.

Rikki shrugged. 'Sorry, too lazy. You should rather look for Miss Chatham.'

'Sure.' Without lot of explanation she went.

'We began with metrics', said Ash as he saw a cover of Shakespeare's Hamlet close to Cleo's bed.

'What is that?', inquired Rikki. She was certain, had Emma been still in the room, she'd probably got herself an exhausted sigh.

'Pronunciation and stress of poems. We started such a love poem of Ovid. Strange thing. It covers several books.'

'In Latin?' Emma asked, who'd just popped in for a last - and by time the third - question whether anyone wanted to join her. Like the two times before, it ended in the prospective of her going alone. She felt Rikki's warning glare in her back as she left.

'Luckily not, a translation, but it's bad enough. That guy wrote stupid things, it's funny though', answered Lewis. '_She's in gold-thread? She's more precious than gold: She wears wool, approve the wool she's wearing. She leaves off her tunic -_ as today we'd call it a negligee - ,_ cry: 'You set me on fire', but request her anxiously to beware of chills._'

'You learned that by heart?' Cleo exclaimed in bewilderment.

For a moment Lewis had to try hiding the smirk that crept up his lips. 'No! Only this part. Well, actually I know more. It's easy to remember. The headings of the chapters are even better: Tears, Kisses and Take the Lead; Promise and Deceive-'

'Oh, wonderful'. Rikki murmured, interrupting Lewis' euphoric headline quoting. '_You set me on fire!_ This is crap. Shall I set him aflame? Then he knows what it means.'

'It is not that bad, though.' Ash cut in. 'We are considering to make a play of it by end of the year - of course rewritten partly into comedy. Well, by our standards, most of it already is comedy.'

'We?' Rikki asked suspiciously, shooting a glance at Lewis.

Her stare made him answer her question immediately. 'Wasn't my idea. Don't know who proposed this. We wanted to do it only in our class and parents. No others.'

'And how should we do it?' Cleo asked. 'It sounds more than that stream of consciousness thing, than a real play.'

Again, Ash helped out. 'Oh, there are many ways. Like one narrator, commenting it and the others acting after what he reads or just acting several scenes as kind of a romance story.'

'I think finding Miss Chatham is easier', mumbled Cleo.

'If we do the play', Rikki asked curiously, 'am I allowed to do the pyros?'

22. 22

22_

'To be honest, I respect you for trying to settle so far in the North.'

'Why so?' Cassandra unlocked the old, rusty, partly grey painted garden gate and moved quickly to the entrance door of the house. As soon as they had got the house for an operation, they had also received a long list with prohibitions on using it. We are not allowed to blow it up? she'd asked, sarcasm in her voice, after her boss had finished with the _do that and you are going to live in a nightmare_ part. Our life is not James Bond, she'd said. What the hell do they think in the higher levels? Her boss had just shrugged and smiled at her. He'd thought the same.

Cassandra pushed the heavy door open. 'Looks like a decent masonry', she commented friendly. It was right after all, the walling probably would survive a small explosion, if it had to. Maybe she should test it. Just to find out what would happen next...

'Not quite.'

'Why so?', she repeated her question, this time stressing wonder in her tone.

It was wise to take this place as a book seller and hobby librarian, Cassandra noticed, while she strode through the foyer. Though she was unable to spot any stacks of books in this very room, she saw shelves over shelves in all the others. Due to building the house there were no real walls that separated the rooms as they usually did, but breaks offered a flowing passage between all of them. It probably was built this way right from the start and probably by someone extremely rich.

She remembered the terms of use laid upon this operation.

They were not allowed to change anything, which included neither to set the house on fire nor to blow it up. Yes - to cameras, bugs and listening devices. No - to changes that were not re-changeable. No - to using the upper floor at all in exception for the bath room (of course) and taking away one single book was literally sentenced with

death. Luckily, she would stay nothing more but a couple of days meeting a few informants. Whoever was in charge of this house by now, he or she or they must be quite eccentric. But whoever they were, they allowed spies in their mansion. It was easier to have some things hidden away from the public that far in the north, so they had accepted the house, with all its limitations.

She threw her coat carelessly over the back rest of a couch and searched for the closest heater, turning it on full heat. The heater rumoured a bit, water bubbled somewhere in the metal bars, but eventually it kicked in and started to radiate warmth.

Cassandra was certain she would not receive an answer to her question any more. Maybe she could ask it another time again or find a different way to crack the facade of the society and be filled in with local gossip which was usually kept safely away from any newcomers. Yet, she may earn some credit for coming voluntarily up here. Or even more suspicion.

'How long, did you say, has the house been empty?', she asked. As long as the old man stayed with her, she may as well try to be polite.

'It's been eight to twelve years. Since old Mrs Lillian Finnigan died', he answered with a sigh.

'You were unable to find a tenant in all those years?' She asked with a bit of humour in her voice. 'That old thing is a treasure. Speaking architecturally.'

'No, it is a curse. Still, I think it would be weird to actually find one who is willing to stay.' Again this hint deriving from his unconsciousness. She tried to recall, whether she'd read anything in the files. Nothing. 'My most uncomplaining tenant stayed for a week.' The old man chuckled at his memory

This time she didn't bother asking, but turned around and raised an eyebrow at him. It seemed to work more efficiently than her first two attempts.

'Lillian Finnigan's family always lived on this property and, well, most died young. Though it was caused by war and not disease. In her best years, already being a widow, she hired a family from Aberdeen. A lively and recently married couple. Each year they went back to Aberdeen for a week or so. As rumour goes she has been an artist or so and he might have been a lawyer. But that is what rumour says and it says a lot when time passes. Mrs Finnigan and the two young lads became a thing like a family, even more when there was a daughter. I've heard they started going weird shortly after her birth yet it got worse, when there was a second daughter born to them. Both, the family and Mrs Finnigan were described as being weird and arcane and... you know. Maybe they just wanted to hide a scandal, who knows? It appeared to affect poor Lillian most, yet I would say it were the first symptoms of her cancer and the young family just supported her as much as they could. I guess they didn't want the whole town to know about her disease.'

'May you please shorten it? I am sorry to ask you, but I have lot to do today. This morning already creeped me out, when I thought, I wouldn't make it in time to meet you.'

'Sure, sorry, miss. There was one of their annual travels from which the family ne'er returned. Apparently it has been an accident killing them. Shortly after the pet dog was found stabbed.'

'Apparently an accident?', Cassandra repeated doubtfully. 'Couldn't the police prove it? I always thought London was a chaos.'

'Urm, yes and no. The accident was an accident. But the deaths are quite strange. Say, the mystery happened first the year before Mrs Finnigan died. The youngest - or eldest daughter - returned from the dead. Or so, Lillian Finnigan claimed. Yet, there was no other proof but the old woman's words. Supposed she suffered cancer and died of a brain tumor in the end, it is more probable that she imagined it.'

'So, it is your house now?'

'No, I am just a leasing it for a young estate seller, still, it is not her house either. Actually, I have no idea. Nothing was done after the last five deaths, though the poor family was erased from here. My wife suspects they had something illegal going on.' He shrugged. Either he didn't agree with his wife or he just didn't care about rumour.

She gave him a knowing smile. 'Oh, for heaven's sake. There has to be something easy understandable about this mess!'

'Yeah. Someone above regular police, bloody secretiveness.' He excused for his last outburst, wished her well and went home, leaving her happy about his disappearance in the end. Ethan would be excited about the whole thing: an amazing view on the landscape next to Carlisle, no annoying neighbours and enough mystery threads to make a story out of it. She could do some research for him to present him a fine net for a new idea.

For a second she stood alone in the middle of what appeared to be a living room. Silence rose around her and was just interrupted by the heater bubbling every now and then. She thought the limitations were stupid. Especially those for the floor above.

She went upstairs, careful, for every step creaked dangerously. The upper floor had real rooms, all separated from a gallery from which she could look down at the foyer. She turned on the light - to her surprise, it worked - and walked past the closed doors. Their dark painted colour broke and got cut over time, fitting the atmosphere of the property. She opened the last door and threw a glance inside. The bath room, more luxurious than she had expected. Behind the second door was something like a living room, the former empty space filled with cupboards and boxes. The next room included a king-sized bed, looking like it waited for the night and dark red curtains shielded a vast glass front. A mirror reflected the drawing of a full moon dwelling over a calm ocean. _Well, who likes it. _Could have been the parents' room, she guessed. An empty photo-frame watched from a side desk as she closed the door behind her.

Another room exposed to be lighter and had less dust in it than the last one. Cream coloured blinds flanked two large windows. Cleaning the panes at least once a decade would make it a bit friendlier, Cassandra thought. Her glance hovered on the two beds, pushed

together by their heads. A small side table with a night lamp on it parted them. A book shelf, full of children's and youth's books bordered a whole length and height of a wall. A student's desk sat by the windows, being old and dusty. A pile of exercise books on the one end and bleached paper at the other one. Both covered in dust. Much like the parents' bed these ones were done as if they awaited the two children to come home and take a nap. She sat down on one of them and looked at the door. Pictures must have been posted on them a long time ago. _Self made? Family pictures?_

She glanced down at the small desk beside her. _Oh, dusting definitely is necessary_. Cassandra pulled out a drawer and fumbled for something like a false bottom. Nothing. What else had she expected?

Pushing back one, she pulled out another and actually found something in it. A thin book. Disappointed but curious she took it out. Anderson's _The Little Mermaid_, read several times and therefore looking used.

She imagined the older girl reading to the younger one, or the parents. Someone must have read it. _Awful bed time story_. _She flipped through the book and its illustrations. The binder had been fixed by the hands of a small child, possessing poor fine-motor skills at her young age. Shutting it she noticed a flat square highlighted in the back of the binder. Slowly she opened the book and closed it again, and open, and close. Either she hallucinated or there was actually something hidden in the binder for several years. She put the book down on the bed and carefully parted the paper from the back cover and tugged out a small picture. The girl on it was horribly young, probably not even a school kid. Her eyes were large and expectant as she beamed up at the photographer in childish naivety. _Could be me or fish tail girl._

Cassandra shook her head, no it could not be her. The girl's eye colour lacked a rich, deep blue and the girl's hair shone stronger than her own. And it couldn't be fish tail girl either, because fish tail girl didn't exist. As soon as the first shock had passed she watched the photograph more closely. It was not the girl, there was something else she recognized.

She squinted her eyes to see the background more clearly. Nothing remarkable, it was probably taken somewhere in the house. But there was something, she just had to lay her finger on it. Thinking about the something Cassandra pulled the pendant on her necklace along the chain links, which produced a soft humming. Metal on metal. Her thoughts were disturbed when the pendant got stuck. She rested the photo in her lap, opened her necklace, each end in one hand and let the pendant - after freeing it - swing on the lace. She concentrated on the pendant. A silver sea shell, carved excellently, yet kept plain and a light red stone was placed in it, which became dark when the light hit in the right angle. She had found engraved letters on the back of it. Some irrelevant initials. She sighed and glanced at the photograph again.

'Oh, damn it!' Jumping to her feet she threw the necklace involuntarily away and the photo landed somewhere on the ground.

Her hands shook slightly as she opened the book again on the first page. Children loved to write their names in their favourite books -

and this one must have been a favourite. She had not paid attention to it earlier. The traces of a pen had vanished completely, but the untrained hand of a young child had put enough pressure on a pen to press the initials for ever inside the pages.

She never considered it as dangerous or spooky to search through left behinds of foreigners, whether they were alive or dead. But having a necklace of the younger daughter of a strange family who probably died in agony and thinking it had been her own - or having it bought from a flea market - was beyond her moral standards and a little bit too canny.

She would tell Ethan, yet not for a new story of his.

23. 23

23_

From: _ldorset... __
>To: _msishq...__
>Subject:_ A wonderful good morning to England! Weekend settled. Again._

It rained yesterday. Chris' roof broke down completely under the weight of the water, yet we shall have it truly fixed by the day after tomorrow (Monday). He wasn't at school, and a heater blew up right next to me, so I had time to think. (For a direct conclusion, skip and be happy with the last few sentences.)

I send a post card early this morning, it should arrive soon. The Barrier Reef is of an unimaginable beauty, when the first rays of sunlight are broken by the water and start lightening up the shadowy darkness... You have to come here for holiday. I know such a thing like 'holiday' does not quite exist, but when you are bored the Reef is worth a long plane flight. The marine diversity is overwhelming.

_I am sorry for the diving gear, or the guy on the beach who distributes it. Had to dispose the air tank, for I scratched a rock and ruined it. And the fins broke. _

Actually I wanted to know whether I am allowed to set up my colleague. The chances for Lisa Rowen are slight, yet there are some. She cares for him.

For the case, we are very close. I expect a complete close down by the end of the week, or earlier. As soon as I have a clearer notion of it, I will inform Chris. Like every year, right now, he is busy hiding his birthday from me.

_ld _

Thanks to leaving my coat at Chris' entrance door and escaping through his living room my wound from the lighthouse-jump had opened again. Well, to be precise, it was neither Chris's fault - whatever he did to my arm, the bandage held perfectly - nor me climbing on the rest of his roof. Yet, the time I returned to my flat I de-wound the gauze and fitted it neatly into a dustbin. Until then, nothing more happened to my wound. But this morning I dived to fast and scratched

a rock and some reef parts, which made the metal air tank let go of the air and my skin along the wound didn't like it either. At least, my underwater camera survived without serious damage.

Staff meeting on Saturday morning. Could be worse. I entered the auditorium, stuffed my miraculous calculator into my bag and searched for a seat. It turned out to be the one, on which my coat rested and my gloves lay upon. Chris was better in returning things than I was. A moment later Lyle Panfield, a man in his late fifties who wore glasses because he was used to them, not because he actually required help of artificial lenses, settled down just in front of me. He carried an astronomy book with him, some biography about the greatest scientists.

'Found your things earlier, just didn't know to whom they belong. Well, I guessed it was you, but you weren't here.'

I smiled a thanks for his concern. 'Oh, sorry to have misguided you, Lyle. There was a call from the hospital and I didn't want everybody to know what my medical status is up to.' I winked at him. 'Thanks for watching over my things.'

His brow furrowed, the silver-grey of his iris froze behind the glasses for a moment. He glanced down at my arm. 'Is it very bad?'

'No, it was a regular call. Don't worry, please.' I pointed at my arm. 'This is just a scratch.'

'Your regular!' He exclaimed shocked. 'Oh, dear.' He cleared his throat and glanced around the room. I followed where his gaze lingered a bit longer. He was thinking about something and when he made it up, he would tell. It was Panfield's habit to fall silent and muse about thoughts, even more when he felt affected by them.

All sport teachers hovered together in a bunch and one of them explained a technique of shot-put. She only stopped her vivid explanation when our principal passed them in a hurry, just to return a second later and talk to them. It was probably about a sports meeting, according to their gestures. From my school days, I remembered enough about sports meetings to dismiss them: I always felt like a stranger tiptoeing in tutus around the place until it was over. Why need so many spectators for sprint? Being judge was definitely more interesting. You observe, check whether it fits the rules and evaluate it by giving a thumbs up or not. Though, some rules were absurd, for they could not be broken - at least not from the average pupil. At least I have never seen a student doing a somersault long jump.

Few metres away a music teacher, head teacher for one of the lower grades talked to a chemistry teacher, if I wasn't completely mistaken about Sarah Pearce. She was, I guess, assistant head teacher in his class and he was in hers.

Maybe we were going to plan class trips soon, or a science-week - something like a subject related project trip - which mainly ended in skilled works and colloquia. I don't remember clearly where we had been. In primary school we were two days in London and after the A-Levels a week in Wales. For some reason we had been in Ireland, too. It must have been something with history and Barcelona for the

Spanish lessons. Though, I replaced my latter exam by such a skilled work. I could speak a couple of languages fluently, but Spanish was definitely not among them. Actually it's sad, I thought, but I never found access to it.

Ireland has been most impressive. I even returned later to fetch some things for a friend.

I looked out for Chris. He had to be somewhere here. Though, I didn't know whether I looked for him just to know, where not to go. As always, I didn't care so much as to do another proper bandage.

'You know, each time I think of retiring I know I am going to miss every bit of being here.' Lyle Panfield's glance slipped over everyone again. 'I don't want to retire.'

'You have many years left until you have to think of this.'

He ignored the reassuring tone in my words and argued against in his somehow thoughtful voice. 'It may appear long, but it isn't. Time passes so fast. I remember the days I have been a pupil attending this school, as vivid as they had happened less than a year ago. But it is several decades. More than quarter of a century.'

'Lyle, those sad thoughts won't help you. Enjoy the years you have, you are a brilliant teacher, you are going to be missed.' I paused and continued with less intensity. 'We had someone like you. He was biology teacher and, though having retired for several years, he assisted on the class trips. He flew to Rome and Dublin, just because he didn't want to go either. And no one wanted to let him go.'

Lyle laughed. 'Well, Rome is not one of my destinations. A bit far away.'

'Distance is no excuse. I am from further away.' I smiled at him.

'You are way younger than me', he objected.

'Age doesn't mean you shouldn't travel.'

After a moment, he nodded slowly. 'You wouldn't let me win an argument, would you?'

'Nope.' I flashed him a smile and he grinned back.

'You are amazing, Lorelei. I have hardly met anyone who's more upright and straighter in a supporting way than you.'

'There's always someone.' I sighed, may he take it as compassion. How easy it was to slip in a lie now and then. And how easy it was for people to believe them.

Chris recited how the situation must have gone exactly an hour ago. Lisa sat beside him, asking someone else about what they expected to have as a solution today. How long it would take, because she wanted to see her sister this evening. He made a mental note to check on her free days next week. It might prove helpful for his further plans to have Lisa around. For now, he ignored her chatter and concentrated on what was written on his reader. It was a conversation between Charlotte and her father, sent to him sixty minutes after it had happened. He skipped through the conversation, highlighting to himself the most important bits of it.

I- I don't know. It still feels- strange just thinking of going back. I- don't want. Charlotte: Insecure.

Nonsense, sweetie. You've got holidays now, so you may have a look at what's going on in your old school and say hi. Dad: Encouraging. Unaware of her past at GC.

He skipped a few more lines, trying to memorize why he should survey Charlotte's actions even though it had been Lorelei who installed the devices and hence, secured every move Charlotte would make.

The second or third day of their teaching she had left him nothing but a scribbled note saying he should inform her as soon as Charlotte would return. Her note left out of question whether she ever would. She seemed to expect her return. Why, she had never told him. And he didn't ask because he supposed, she wouldn't answer him anyway.

So he spent his whole time in Australia by reading through transcripts sent to him. Mostly a waste of time. Meanwhile, he suspected Lorelei had tasked him with it, so she could work on the case alone. He never expected Charlotte to actually come back to her former High School. Apparently his task wasn't as pointless as he had thought it to be. Again, it fitted Lorelei's methods: Do not tell anyone anything, but let them do it. In the end everything would work out as she had planned it.

He concentrated on the text in front of him. Finally, a change in Charlotte's attitude. At least, he hoped for it.

But you told me, you even found friends there.

Well yes, but... that has been... more or less real friendship.

_Then think about it today and decide tomorrow, okay? _Dad: Desperate to integrate his daughter.

Sure.

I thought you liked the art studio?

Yeah, it wasn't a real one, though... I don't really know anyone...

O, seriously Charlotte, you've never been that shy.

No, I am not shy... I... a few things went wrong and actually I wanted to kiss it goodbye... somehow. Charlotte: Angry.

You're dramatizing it!

I am sorry.- Okay, fine. I am going to ask, if I may see the art studio.

That's my girl. Dad: Proud.

'What are you reading?' Lisa peered over his shoulder, leaning against him. She sat an inch too close for his liking. A strand of her hair brushed against his neck.

Chris smiled at her. 'A drama, Lisa.' A sigh escaped him. 'A mere drama.'

'Oh, what about?'

He continued reading for a second, as if he wanted to finish a paragraph then turned his reader off. 'A pile of misty developments and right now, there's the anticipation coming in. I believe it is but a distraction', he mumbled still in thought about the change Charlotte would or would not bring.

'So, the ending is obvious?'

'I fear not. Nathaniel, my brother, wrote it. He never makes anything easy for me, not even the decision whether I like what he does or what he doesn't. It's an average brotherly conflict we are bound to fight, which I am afraid, will be the underlying theme of his work.'

'What's the tragic flaw?'

'Attachment. One having it and one despising it.'

She was silent for a while. 'It rather sounds like a comedy', Lisa then remarked.

'Maybe you're right. I should tell him.'

End
file.